

**Did the Recommendations Arising from Three Whole School Evaluations
which were Implemented and Enacted by the Principal Provide a Blueprint
for Improvement and Educational Change in a Post-Primary School in
Rural Ireland?**

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education (EdD), is entirely my own work and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:

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Dedication

To my parents, Anne and Patrick, for being so kind and patient with me my entire life. Thank you for your love.

To my family, thank you for your love and encouragement.

Thank you to my sibling and her family for their support and love.

Thank you to my dearest friend, Michaela for a lifetime of kindness.

I owe so much to all of you.

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

ASTI: Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland

CERI: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

CPD: Continuous Professional Development

DCU: Dublin City University

DE: Department of Education (from 2020 onwards)

DES: Department of Education and Science (up to 2010)

DES: Department of Education and Skills (up to 2020)

DIDM: Data Informed Decision Making

ESRU: The Evaluation Support and Research Unit

EU: European Union

FTI: Follow-Through Inspection

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

LAOS: Looking at Our School

LCA: Leaving Certificate Applied

MMR: Mixed Methods Research

NEC: National Education Convention

NVivo: NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PE: Physical Education

PDST: Professional Development Service for Teachers

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

SDPI: The School Development Planning Initiative

SICI: Association of National and Regional Inspectorates of Education in Europe

SIP: School Improvement Plan

SPSS: The IBM software platform offering advanced statistical analysis for data management

SSE: School Self-Evaluation

TA: Thematic Analysis

TALIS: Teaching and Learning International Survey

TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

WSE: Whole School Evaluation

WSE-MLL: Whole School Evaluation, Management, Leadership, and Learning

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Abstract

The Department of Education in Ireland employs a suite of inspection modalities to evaluate the quality of educational provision in secondary schools. Whole School Evaluations (WSE) in particular aim to monitor and assess facets of the whole school, in terms of the ‘economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided by the State by recognised schools and centres for education’ (Education Act 1998, Section 7 (2) (b)).

This study set out to hear directly from present students, past pupils, teachers, ancillary staff, parents, and former inspectors as to whether the recommendations arising from three whole school inspection reports provided a blueprint for improvement and educational change in a post-primary school in rural Ireland. Two former inspectors give their perspectives on inspection in general.

The researcher conducted a thematic review of relevant peer-reviewed literature on the changing functions, roles, and responsibilities of the Inspectorate from 1980 to 2018 as well as on the evolving frameworks of inspection that were developed during this seminal period for the Inspectorate. The researcher took a pragmatic approach to the research methodology, adopting a single case-study methodology within a mixed-method sequential quantitative > qualitative research design. Surveys were the quantitative research instruments employed; 578 students were surveyed, as well as 335 parents and 31 teachers. Semi-structured interviews which were carried out with 19 participants informed the qualitative approach. The findings are analysed within the context of the literature review. The researcher presents the findings from both the surveys and semi-structured interviews whilst acknowledging the implications and limitations of the study. The researcher identifies recommendations and considers recommendations for further research and policy development.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Brief Overview of the Ever-Changing Educational Landscape in Ireland

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) was introduced in schools in Ireland in 2004, following a pilot project which took place from 1998-1999. A report on the pilot project was prepared by the Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) and was circulated to all post-primary schools in the country in December 1999. According to the Department's Annual Report of 1999 (p.41):

The report confirmed the potential of the WSE model of evaluation to successfully combine school self-review with external inspection, using common criteria of evaluation. The WSE pilot project experience in 1999 was a landmark in the development of a new model of school evaluation and a milestone in the preparation of the Inspectorate for its evolving role in school and system quality assurance.

Subsequent to this pilot phase, the Inspectorate, under the auspices of the ESRU, did some further work before WSE was established as a national system. WSE became an established model of whole school evaluation in 2004. Whole School Evaluation (WSE) was carried out by the inspectors in the school under study in 2005. It is noteworthy that all WSE reports were online on the Department of Education's website from 2006.

Although there have been ongoing modifications in the wording of the key principles that inform inspections since the Whole School Inspection carried out in 2005 in this school, I considered it appropriate to note the key principles that inform inspections from *A Guide to Inspection in Post-Primary Schools* (2022). Key principles that inform inspections are outlined in *A Guide to Inspection in Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2022, p.9):

The Inspectorate is focused on ensuring that students in schools receive the best possible education in light of their potential and their learning needs. High standards in teaching and in the learning outcomes and experiences of students are promoted by the Inspectorate as it strives to enable learning organisations to improve the quality of the education they provide.

Inspectors are committed to carrying out inspections in ways that provide real opportunities to affirm good practice and to provide practical advice to individual teachers, to principals and to boards of management with the ultimate aim of improving learning experiences and outcomes for students.

The work of the Inspectorate is underpinned by four key principles:

1. A focus on learners
2. Development and improvement
3. Respectful engagement
4. Responsibility and accountability

Research by McNamara and O'Hara (2008), McNamara et al. (2002), Mathews (2010), and Griffin (2010) has been carried out on the purpose of WSE in post-primary schools in Ireland. This present study adds to the body of literature available on WSE on account of it being a single case study based on a particular school, which has not been done before. An account of the perceptions of students, past-pupils, teachers, parents, ancillary staff and former inspectors on the process of WSE may inform a future direction for WSE in Ireland. As the principal of the school from 2005 to 2021, I am interested to find out whether the findings of this study revealed that the recommendations of WSE (2005; 2015; and 2018) provided a blueprint for school improvement and educational change.

The research question that this research sought to answer is: Did the recommendations and implementation of the recommendations pertaining to three Whole School Evaluations provide a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in a post-primary secondary school in rural Ireland?

Ireland in the 1990s

The 1990s were seminal years in terms of inspection policy in Ireland; according to Coolahan and O'Donovan (2009), great changes were taking place in terms of the policy perspective on the Inspectorate and the work of the Inspectorate in the fast-changing societal context and educational environment in Ireland. Economic and social imperatives dominated the rhetoric around inspection. These imperatives had consequences not only for inspection policy and frameworks but also for all of those who worked in schools. Gone were the days of hardly ever seeing an inspector in the school, except to probate a beginning teacher. Historically, post-primary schools were inspected very infrequently as the Inspectorate were primarily concerned with the management and the administration of the national certificate examinations. In my own experience, I was inspected once over a twenty-five-year period, but that all changed in the early 2000s.

The 1990s saw the establishment of the National Education Convention at which the purpose, structure and future development of the Irish education system was discussed at length. This was followed by the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* in 1995. It is worth noting that, according to Coolahan and O' Donovan (2009), the Chief Inspector, Seán Mac Gleannáin took a very active role in getting the Inspectorate ready for the aspects of the White Paper (1995) that were most likely to affect its work. The White Paper (1995) put forward a

philosophical rationale for the role of the State in education. According to the White Paper (1995, pp.4-5):

The development of a philosophical rationale for the role of the State in education was informed by the following principles:

The articulation, nationally of a statement of broad educational aims, which focus on nurturing the holistic development of the individual and promoting the social and economic welfare of society, including the provision and renewal of the skills and competencies necessary for the development of our economy and society.

It is interesting that education as a principle in the White Paper not only focuses on the development of the individual but also on the development of the Irish economy and Irish society. This is a new development which was in keeping with the understanding of the purpose of education throughout Europe and the United States at that time, that education was not only good for the individual but for the economy and society as a whole.

Education was now seen as being fundamental to enabling greater equity in society, and protecting and developing the future economic development of Ireland. As Benjamin Franklin said, an investment in education always pays the highest dividend. In sum, the belief in formulating educational policy in Ireland was that it was a step towards an effective and prosperous economy, but a very critical one.

The notion of accountability was firmly raised in the White Paper (1995), as a necessary component in developing a philosophical rationale that informed state educational policy. The White Paper stated that said philosophical rationale 'promotes transparency and greater accountability and provides a rationale for the allocation and use of resources and makes it

easier to evaluate educational provision'. The inference is that the more the workforce in Ireland became better educated and better skilled, the more that the Irish economy would prosper. Following on from the White Paper (1995), the Education Act was passed in 1998. For the first time the Inspectorate and its functions were given statutory status in Section 13 of the Education Act (1998). The functions of the Inspectorate were very clearly defined in the Act. The core remit of the Inspectorate was as follows:

- Programme of Inspection in Schools
- Promoting compliance with Regulation and Legislation
- Advisory role for schools and the Department
- Contribution to Policy Development.

The Education Act (1998) was a very significant piece of legislation, as education was now being seen as a priority for national policy. Ireland was being significantly influenced by outside agencies such as the OECD and the EU in terms of educational policy. The opening up of international trends and thinking on inspection created a context for re-appraising the Irish Inspectorate. What followed was indeed a process of re-structuring the Inspectorate in Ireland. The Inspectorate was charged with assuring the quality of education provision in Ireland.

The OECD played its part in influencing the form of indicators which enabled government authorities and other relevant parties to judge the Irish education system and to make amendments as required. Comparisons were now being made in relation to the effectiveness of education systems throughout the OECD countries. Teachers were not overlooked in this system appraisal. Standards achieved in education and the performance of teachers became a topic of discussion, thus putting pressure on school personnel. The emphasis on transparency and accountability was now part of the education agenda like all other public services.

Some educational commentators took exception to what they perceived to be ‘a new public management’ approach to education, for example Vigoda (2003), Tolofari (2005) and Maroy (2009). Others were somewhat dismayed that educational reform was occurring as a result of an economic agenda, and that the aim of enhancing the prosperity of the country was foremost in the mind of some economists (McNamara and O’Hara, 2008; Sugrue, 2006; Clarke, 2004). There was now what some called a market orientation, which was linked to education. All evaluations became standards-linked, whereby to get a positive inspection report, certain standards which are specified by the Inspectorate have to be attained. Teachers were now closely observed in their classrooms, and the management of the school was scrutinised to ensure that the students are offered a quality education. Triangulation is used via surveying students and parents. There can be no doubt that evaluation in Ireland has become robust since the introduction of WSE in 2004.

1.2 The Three Inspections in This Case Study

The WSE which was carried out in the school under study in 2005 was conducted by the inspectors under the following headings: management, planning, curriculum provision, learning and teaching, and support for students. The Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was carried out in 2015 and the Follow Through Inspection (FTI) was carried out in 2018.

1.3 The Researcher

In order that the readers of this study consider the validity and reliability of this research, I would like to situate myself. I was principal of this school and therefore led the attempt to respond to the three inspections that took place during that time.

According to Fleming (2018), insider research is often contrasted with research undertaken by an outsider. The outsider is not a member and does not have prior knowledge of the group or organisation about which the research is being undertaken. Chavez (2008) and Hellowell (2006) suggest that at one stage, from a positivist perspective, research being conducted by an outsider was the only form of objective research.

The position of insider research has also been criticised for its lack of rigour, because it was considered by some (for example, Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) that the insider's position of being too close to the study led to a loss of objectivity. However, according to Fleming (2018), both insiders and outsiders have to contend with methodological matters of identity and the knowledge they possess as a result of their position. In the words of Chavez (2008, p.274) 'The insider-outsider distinction is a false dichotomy'.

It is noteworthy regarding this study that in the field of education, according to Brannick and Coghlan (2007), Floyd and Arthur (2012), and Mercer (2007), more researchers have engaged in examining their own practice and as a result insider methodologies have become more common. My aim in this study was to add to the body of knowledge in relation to whole school evaluations. These school evaluations improved my practice through understanding, and influenced the direction I took with others on the road to school improvement.

I would strongly argue that, although I had intimate knowledge of the organisation from the academic year 2005/2006 until 2020/2021, I was not the author of the recommendations which provided a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in this school. I was rather the implementer of said blueprint. The recommendations of the WSE reports provided me with the means of implementing and enacting school improvement. I was on my own for a short

time but I was soon joined by an able staff group who gave of their time freely to move the school along the continuum of improvement. This continuum originated from the recommendations of the inspectors. When there were roadblocks along the way, I made use of the strong ethical arm of the inspectors' reports to negotiate necessary change.

I was conscious throughout this study of my obligation to carry out my research in an ethical manner. I had to be aware at all times that the relationships which were normal in the everyday functioning of the school had to be viewed from a different perspective, that of a researcher. The perception of implicit coercion during recruitment of the qualitative part of this study in particular had to be addressed, as a power relationship did exist in my case.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis Chapters

The outline of the five thesis chapters is described below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2 The Literature Review

This chapter presents the relevant literature concerning this study and is divided into the five sections outlined below.

Section 1: The Operational and Administrative Changes in the Department of Education Inspectorate from 1980 to 2002.

Section 2: The Inspectorate in Transition 2003 to 2018.

Section 3: The Theoretical Framework – Fullan et al. (2005), Eight Drivers of Educational Change.

Section 4: Literature Review of the themes which arose following the inspections.

Section 5: An analysis of the documents arising from the inspection reports of 2005, 2015, and 2018.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The Methodology chapter defines the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance, and outlines the research paradigm. The researcher adopted a pragmatic approach to answer the research question. The researcher adopted a case-study methodology to investigate the research questions. A mixed-methods research approach was adopted, which included a pencil and paper survey, surveys using google forms, and semi-structured interviews as the qualitative approach method. Furthermore, the Methodology chapter defines the sampling process, access to participants, piloting the survey and interview, presenting the findings to participants, research ethics, collecting and analysing the data. Limitations are acknowledged.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data. Data from the quantitative survey are presented. The findings from the quantitative phase are presented in the form of charts with respondents' comments to illustrate their perspectives on whether the recommendations of the inspectors' reports on whole school evaluations provided a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in the school. The findings also present the data from the qualitative approach of the semi-structured interviews to illustrate their perspectives on the research question. The results are interpreted and evidence is presented that supports the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations.

This chapter considers the research findings. The researcher discusses the findings in the context of the literature review. The themes which derive from the findings are examined and analysed in relation to whether the participants agree or disagree with the research question, namely, whether the recommendations of the three whole school inspection reports provided a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in this school. The conclusion

summarises the previous chapters and the key points which derived from the study. The chapter concludes with the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Section 1: Operational and Administrative Changes in the Department of Education

Inspectorate from 1980 to 2002.

2.1 Introduction

This study investigates the impact of the recommendations of Inspection reports on overall operational effectiveness in a rural post-primary school in Ireland. The context for the study spans a time of significant educational change in Ireland from the 1980s to 2018 and further incorporates the implications of those changes for the Irish Inspectorate. The Inspectorate is the division of the Department of Education responsible for the evaluation of primary and post-primary schools and centres for education. Inspectors also provide advice on a range of educational issues to school communities, policy makers in the department and to the wider educational system. Most inspectors are experienced teachers. Some have worked as school principals or as advisors with school support services. Others have experience in curriculum design, the implementation of assessment practices in in-school management, and educational research.

The literature review for this study spans five sections. Section 1 considers operational and administrative changes in the Inspectorate from 1980 to 2002. Section 2 examines the Inspectorate in transition between 2003 and 2018. Section 3 offers an explanation of the theoretical framework used in this study. Section 4 considers the themes that arose from the inspections. Section 5 details an analysis of the documents resulting from three inspection reports, resulting from inspections which took place in the school under study in the period 2005 to 2018. The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) educational conferences in 1985 and 1987 are mentioned in terms of their influence on school inspection. Publications such as the Green Paper 1992 (DES, 1992) and the White Paper 1995 (DES, 1995)

are examined, as well as the Education Act of 1998 (DES, 1998), which gave a legal basis to the Inspectorate in the period under study. The literature review includes both Irish and international perspectives in education as the Irish Inspectorate was following wider global trends as a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

In Ireland, young people transition from primary school to secondary school at age twelve approximately. The Irish secondary system comprises of a three-year lower secondary programme and a three-year upper secondary programme. At age fifteen approximately young people sit the *Junior Certificate*, a nationally standardised examination. Performance in the Junior Certificate is predictive of access to employment and training for those young people who choose to leave school at that stage. For those who remain in school, they can either take a one-year optional programme called *Transition Year* or move directly to the two-year upper secondary programme *Leaving Certificate*, a nationally standardised test. Both the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations are high-stake examinations. The majority of students in Ireland choose to sit the Leaving Certificate examination, and according to O'Brien (2017), 'Ireland has the second highest retention rate in the EU with 94% of students remaining in upper secondary education'.

The Irish educational system is general rather than vocational in nature. As regards tertiary education, nearly half of those aged from twenty-five to sixty-four (47%) have attained a tertiary-level education, one of the largest percentages across the OECD countries – the younger cohort (aged 25-34 years old) reaching 60% for women, and 52% amongst young men in the same age group (OECD, 2019). Access to courses in higher education is predicated on the grades achieved in the Leaving Certificate examination. The level of education achieved by Irish young people is highly predictive of later-life opportunities. According to Smyth and

McCoy (2009, p.1), ‘education is a powerful predictor of adult life chances’. Young people with a higher education qualification can expect higher-quality employment and higher pay levels.

The purpose of the Inspectorate is to improve the quality of teaching and learning for children and young people in Irish schools, centres for education and other settings, and to support the development of the Irish educational system. They do this through providing high quality evaluation, analysis and advice (DES, 2022). The function of the Inspectorate is to ensure that learners in schools, centres for education and other settings receive the best possible education considering their potential and learning needs. The core elements of the work of the Inspectorate are the evaluation of the work of teachers, schools and centres for education, and the provision of advice and support in relation to educational provision. The Inspectorate disseminates the findings of its evaluations by means of publication and discussion. It also publishes advice as to how the work of education providers and the learning of students can be improved. In addition, it contributes to the development of Irish education policy and provision and advises the Minister for Education accordingly (DES, 2016).

2.2 The Inspectorate in the 1980s

During the 1980s in Ireland the Inspectorate faced significant difficulties in working conditions and staffing. In 1982 the Chief Inspector, Dr Liam O’Maolcatha, wrote to the incoming Minister for Education, Dr Martin O’Donoghue, informing him that there were no inspectors of German or Physics, and that there was only one inspector for French and two for Mathematics, stressing the difficulties for the effective functioning of the Inspectorate without these key positions in place (Coolahan and O’Donovan, 2009). At this time, according to Brown et al. (2018, p.79), the role of inspection ‘was greatly diminished, partly due to the

power of the teacher unions but also because much of the resourcing of the Inspectorate was directed to other tasks particularly the management of the annual state examinations.’ As MacCárthaigh notes,

The examinations alone could provide full-time work for our very small inspectorate establishment. The inspection of schools is at present quite inadequate and fairly haphazard. We have not even managed to begin the much-needed overhaul of inspection and reporting procedures.’ (MacCárthaigh, 1985, cited in Coolahan and O’Donovan, 2009, pp. 211-212)

The traditional structure of the Inspectorate, consisting of overseeing the State examinations and carrying out infrequent inspections, continued with little or no readjustment until the 1990s. Coolahan and O’Donovan (2009) report some increases in staffing, but these increased levels were not sustained during an employment embargo imposed on the Civil Service in 1981, which had detrimental consequences for the Inspectorate (Drudy and Collins, 2011).

From the mid-1980s, a more structured engagement with international peers began. This period of engagement started when Dr Liam O’Maolcatha, Chief Inspector, and Seán Mac Cártaigh, Deputy Chief Inspector, attended a conference in Amsterdam organised by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), which is part of the OECD. According to Coolahan and O’Donovan (2009), this was the first time that representatives from the highest ranks of national inspectorates in Western Europe met to discuss their role and functions as inspectors, and was a significant step forward for the Irish Inspectorate in on-going engagement and subsequent collaboration with other inspectorates.

The second CERI conference took place in Oxford in 1987. The focus had moved from that of the first CERI conference in 1985 on the role of the Inspectorate in educational change to one of quality in education. A main conclusion of the conference was that the role to which the Inspectorate should aspire was that of quality broker, which would entail advising, offering guidance, and working on change by means of negotiation rather than relying on the legislative instrument.

Seán MacGleannáin was appointed as Chief Inspector in the Department of Education in 1990. His appointment coincided with a time when there was much international and national change in the role and functions of the Inspectorate. In his new role, MacGleannáin set out to ensure that the position of Chief Inspector should be one of substantial leadership. Similarly, Dr Clive Hopes of the German Institute for International Research suggested that ‘The Chief Inspector should take charge of the Inspectorate. The position should no longer be regarded as a figure head’ (1991, p.58). Thus, from 1994 Seán MacGleannáin made strong and successful attempts to ensure that the Inspectorate was incorporated as a specific entity in the 1998 Education Act.

By the mid-1990s, Ireland was heralded as one of the fastest growing economies in both the European Union and the OECD, having emerged strongly from a prolonged period of economic stagnation *vis à vis* high unemployment, emigration, and crippling public debt despite high taxes (O’Gráda and O’Rourke, 1996; Honohan and Walsh, 2002). Improved prosperity enabled the Irish State to reassess the education system in light of emerging economic growth. This change of focus would have ramifications for both schools and the Inspectorate. Fitzgerald (1999, p.38) noted that in the case of Ireland, ‘past failures and current successes owe something to changing attitudes to investment in education’. According to the then Minister for Education, Michael Woods,

Education has long been seen as one of the most critical factors in determining the success of our children and young people as they take their place in society and make their contribution to Ireland's economic growth, prosperity and social development. (Department of Education and Skills Annual Report, 2000, p.4).

Similarly, Bils and Klenow (2000), Cohen and Soto (2007), Hanushek and Kimko (2000), and Krueger and Lindahl (2001) recognised people as human capital and showed how increased investment in knowledge, skills, and health provided returns to the economy through increases in labour productivity. The link between a growing economy and a quality education system in Ireland meant that the Inspectorate would have a significant part to play in ensuring that *new* knowledge and *new* skills would contribute to increased productivity to sustain economic growth. Consequently, Mr Noel Lindsay, Secretary to the Department of Education, invited Dr Hopes to conduct a review of the role and functions of the Irish Schools' Inspectorate in 1990 (Coolahan and O'Donovan, 2009). Dr Hopes presented his report on the Inspectorate in 1991; the views of the inspectors on their role and functions are freely articulated in the report. Such freedom of expression was highly unusual at that time. The findings showed that the inspectors were committed to undertaking the significant task of reworking and redeveloping the Inspectorate on behalf of the educational stakeholders, but a significant challenge lay in the fact that they were already overburdened by the extensive remit of their job description at that time. According to the Hopes Report (1991, p.16),

Inspectors are all-rounders, who are expected to write speeches about many aspects of the school system and, on occasion, represent the Ministry (of Education) in public meetings, or other professional engagements and in events abroad.

One of the inspectors interviewed in the Hopes Report expressed the view that:

It seems such a pity that the Department has never seen fit to staff and otherwise resource the Inspectorate to enable it to carry out efficiently its quadruple function in curriculum, examinations, inspection and in-service. (Hopes, 1991, p.116)

More broadly, the inspectors' views put forward in the Hopes Report (1991, p.103) claimed that they were isolated from schools and that if they were not in daily contact with the schools, their position became 'increasingly questioned and eroded'. Thus, inspectors sought to get back to schools, where they saw their value as rooted in 'our familiarity with and knowledge of what happens'; furthermore, Inspectors saw themselves as 'the conscience of the educational system' (Hopes, 1991, p.103). Coolahan and O'Donovan (2009, p. 240) noted that 'The Hopes Report was the most comprehensive analysis of the inspectorate which had ever been undertaken, but that its lack of immediate impact was noteworthy'. Although the Hopes Report did not gain traction in 1991, it allowed for the percolation of ideas which were later implemented in the reformed Inspectorate. Hopes himself did not expect great change to result from the findings of his report,

Any planned changes would take some time to bring into effect. In other words, by the time parts of the system begin to operate in new ways we shall be rapidly approaching the 21st century. (Hopes Report, 1991, p.5)

The OECD had completed a review of the Irish education system in 1989. Although the OECD report was not published until 1991, the main text was made available to the Department of Education towards the end of 1989. At the annual conference of the post-primary Inspectorate in 1989, the Secretary General referred to the OECD Report in his address and invited the Inspectorate to meet and reflect on the comments in that report, and to consider the recommendations in terms of their future role.

The OECD review had not considered the Inspectorate in any great detail, but the visiting committee of the OECD (1991, p. 44) indicated that the Irish Inspectorate ‘constitute a formidable body of expertise’ and was a valuable link between the Department and schools, recommending their numbers be increased *or* their various roles in examinations and in-service be much reduced (Coolahan and O’Donovan, 2009; OECD, 1991). The OECD Report further considered that the full potential of the Inspectorate was far from being tapped and should be utilized as a very worthwhile resource. In the event that these proposals were not implemented by the Department, the OECD Review (1991) recommended that the Inspectorate concentrate on auditing school performance and advising the Minister of Education on policy. Although the reviewers themselves recommended a larger Inspectorate, the then Minister for Education, Mary O’Rourke, opted instead for the Inspectorate to play a much bigger role in school performance, monitoring the performance of the system, and engaging in policy development. However, the significant influence of the OECD Review and the Hopes Report *vis à vis* the Inspectorate is evident in aspects of the Green Paper on Education in 1992.

2.3 Green Paper – Education for a Changing World (1992)

A Green Paper represents government proposals on a particular issue, giving the public a chance to consider all recommendations. Green Papers may result in the development of a White Paper, and this was indeed the outcome following the 1992 Green Paper. Seamus Brennan, the then Minister of Education, in the foreword of the publication praised the Irish education system. However, he considered that no education system can stand still, given that the needs of society are always changing, and reiterated that the time had come to make changes in the education system (Green Paper, 1992). Coolahan and O’Donovan (2009, p.243) note that

some of the ideas in the Hopes Report and in the OECD Review formed part of the Green Paper, stating:

In the context of the greater delegation of responsibility to schools, a changed role is envisaged for the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate's main responsibilities will be to evaluate the schools generally, to disseminate good practice and to contribute to the formulation of policy, with particular reference to ensuring and maintaining quality.

According to the Green Paper (1992), the Inspectorate was to be reorganised as a single cohesive unit with statutory powers. The Inspectorate would prepare an annual report on the performance of the school system, which would be published independently. The Green Paper envisaged that inspection would occur on a whole-school basis, using a team approach which would evaluate overall school performance (DES, 1992). The increase in role and responsibilities would necessitate that the Inspectorate be gradually released from the duty of overseeing the State examinations, and it was envisaged by the Department of Education that a new body would be established to oversee this work (DES, 1992). It was also considered that the Inspectorate would not oversee the provision of in-service to teachers but would have a distinct role in maintaining the quality of such in-service (DES, 1992). It was suggested that teachers would be seconded for a fixed term to work with the Inspectorate to facilitate the changes under consideration (DES, 1992).

The Green Paper gave rise to an unrivalled level of national debate at meetings, conferences, symposia and seminars. Almost one thousand written submissions were lodged with the Department of Education in response to the Green Paper (Coolahan, 2007). As the proposals caused a great deal of unease among inspectors, explanatory meetings were held between senior Department officials and the public-sector trade union representing the inspectors. The

union was forthright in its demands on behalf of its members, insisting that there was to be no change in examinations and that teachers were not going to be seconded to work with the Inspectorate. The union further stipulated that the inspectors would remain significantly involved in providing in-service to teachers. The inspectors considered the proposals to be a diminution of their skills and knowledge, and they wanted more inspectors to be appointed.

As one of the inspectors in the Dr Hopes study reported:

I would like to see the inspectors as the best-informed body in Irish education. I would like them to be seen as a body whose advice was sought by teachers, managers, the Department as well as the Minister (Hopes, 1991, p.103).

Because of the objections of the Inspectorate, the proposals in the Green Paper in relation to their situation were high on the agenda of delegates at the National Education Convention held in October 1993.

2.4 National Education Convention 1993

The proposals in terms of the future role of the Inspectorate in the Green Paper (1992) were considered in detail at the National Education Convention in 1993. The conference report confirmed that there was agreement that the Inspectorate has an important and unique role to play in contributing to the effective implementation of the Green Paper proposals, especially those directly related to enhancing the quality of education in the system (Coolahan, 1994).

Furthermore, it addressed the issue that ‘there has been a failure at official level to recognise and develop the potential of this group of individuals, due to understaffing and diversified role’ (Coolahan, 1994, p.64). This confirmed the long-held view of the inspectors themselves that

the potential of the Inspectorate was being ‘stunted’ by low staffing levels and a multiplicity of roles, which took them away from their most significant duty. The delegates at the Convention also stressed that specialist training was needed for the inspectors. The necessity for further study and research also formed part of their recommendations. The National Convention (Coolahan, 1994, p. 28) made reference to the need for ‘a shared dialogue on the core values of the school including the various stakeholders, and that their participation in evaluation by means of their testimony would form part of an extended remit of the Inspectorate’.

2.5 The White Paper 1995 – Further Ramifications for the Inspectorate

Following on from the pertinent issues raised in the Green Paper (DES, 1992), the White Paper in 1995 (DES, 1995) highlighted widespread agreement among all stakeholders in education regarding the need to reflect on educational achievements and plan for future educational provision and practice, which would take account of a rapidly evolving and changing society.

It was envisioned that the Inspectorate’s core vision would be as follows: to evaluate and report on the standards and quality of education provision, the effectiveness of policies and their implementation; to advise on policy formulation; and to supervise the operation of the national examinations system (DES, 1995).

When the White Paper ‘Charting Our Education Future’ was published in 1995, Chapter 5 was wholly devoted to the role of the Inspectorate. Schools were encouraged to develop a school plan, which was somewhat similar to a strategic plan, to encourage all schools to become self-evaluative in their work. The White Paper (1995, p. 196) recommended that the ‘role of the examinations unit of the Central Inspectorate would be to manage the professional and

academic aspects of the operation of the national certificate examinations.’ This was most likely added to ensure that the examination questions followed the aims of the curriculum, and that the monitoring of the marking schemes needed the expertise of the Inspectorate. In sum, in the White Paper, the specified responsibilities of the Inspectorate concentrated on evaluation of educational provision, on the maintenance of educational standards, and on policy formulation (DES, 1995).

2.6 Changes in the Inspectorate 1990-1998

A great deal of change took place in the Inspectorate between 1990 and 1998, in terms of the policy perspectives, and the work of the Inspectorate as it responded to a changing societal context and educational environment, as well as to policy influences from both Ireland and abroad (Sugrue, 1998; Drudy, 2001; MacBeath et al., 1995; Riley and MacBeath, 1998; Fullan, 1990; Leithwood, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1990). The Inspectorate was now firmly involved in the debate on educational policy in Ireland. And, in fora such as the National Education Convention in 1993, participants reflected on the work carried out by the Inspectorate, resulting in closer professional associations between the Inspectorate, academics and researchers. Within the Department, there were much closer links with the Inspectorate from 1996 onwards (Coolahan and O’Donovan, 2009). The professional relationships that were developed between associated agencies in Ireland and abroad were to prove highly advantageous for the imminent restructuring of the Inspectorate at that time.

Eamonn Stack became the Chief Inspector in the Department of Education in 1997. Stack oversaw the Inspectorate at a time of great change in education. He initiated five different inspection models including school, teacher, and subject inspection, in addition to thematic evaluation, and whole-school evaluation. The most significant change was the introduction of

Whole School Evaluation (WSE), which had significant effects on evaluation of education in Ireland. Continuing professional development was also recognised by Stack to be critical to the effectiveness of established inspectors:

If as an inspectorate, we were to become de-skilled or lacking in up-to-date knowledge of the new developments happening all around us, the result would impact seriously on our work in schools. It would also have a bad effect on our individual and collective self-esteem. (*Nuachtlitir*, No. 2, July 1998, p. 2, cited in Coolahan and O'Donovan, 2009, p. 275).

Stack, in an interview with *Aistir*, the journal of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) in March 2009 (2009, pp.19-21), gave a rationale for inspection in which he suggested that the 'renewed' inspection system was transparent and that it was rooted in dialogue and partnership. Stack (2009, p. 19) opined, 'Our first job was to be transparent about what we were going to do, how we were going to do it, and why we were doing it'. On his philosophy on inspection, he was keen to point out that 'inspection is about evidence gathering, being able to form judgements not just in one or two areas, but also on the totality of the education being provided in a school – to see the bigger picture' (Stack, 2009, p.19). Stack was also committed to not associating the work of the Inspectorate with *policing the system*: 'it's not about catching anybody out. We are about promoting internal improvement and development, rather than a policing model of external inspection'. It was not the case, he stressed, that 'we tell you what to do and we'll be back to see that you did it, that would not be effective because you simply cannot impose quality into an organization. People must want to improve' (Stack, 2009, p. 20). As far as Stack (2009, pp. 19-21) was concerned, the ultimate aim of changes in inspection was to affirm and improve the quality of education, putting teachers and principals at the core of that aim:

The Inspectorate regards teachers as co-professionals and we make every effort to foster positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect; we know that teachers are pivotal to maintaining and improving the quality of education our young people receive.

For Stack, a good school has a core focus on teaching and learning; student involvement; implementation and monitoring systems; professional governance; empowering leadership; internal responsibility for change; collegial professionalism of teachers; ownership of quality assurance; parental involvement; and making the best use of available external support. Another important feature of a good school is ‘to have a whole school approach’ for which ‘you have to have teachers working together; collegiality is about people working with a common purpose; you can have collegiality about many things in schools, but the key focus has to be on student outcomes and what can be done to improve them’ (Stack, 2009, p. 20). Furthermore, Stack, (2009, p.20.) outlined his definition of a good school and a good teacher as all encompassing, with the role of the school now seen as more onerous. In terms of teaching, a good teacher is one:

who excites, inspires, and engages, a teacher who presents clear and stimulating lessons, a teacher who facilitates co-operative learning, higher order thinking and problem solving. A good teacher instills a love of learning, is interested in the learner and his/her needs; a good teacher constantly develops his/her practice, has empathy with students, is adaptable and most of all, is a committed learner.

2.7 The Education Act 1998

The Education Act (1998) (DES, 1998) was the first wide-ranging education act in the history of the State. Specifically, ‘school inspection was for the first time in the history of the State, put on a legislative footing’ (Brown et al., 2017, p. 73). The restructuring of the organisational

framework of the Inspectorate had evolved into a much clearer management structure by 1998. There was no ambiguity about the new role for the Irish Inspectorate. The Act stated that ‘The functions of an Inspector shall be: to support and advise recognised schools, centres for education and teachers on matters relating to the provision of education’ (Education Act 1998, Section 13 (3)).

Furthermore, the Education Act (1998, Section, 13) informed the Inspectorate that its function was to ‘evaluate the organization and operation of schools ... and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools’. That is, on a practical level, its function was to make sure that the school organisation functioned administratively in line with the policy of the Act, in terms of teacher allocation; pupil-teacher ratio; allocation of subjects; school day; duration of holidays; and timetabling; and to ensure that all learning and teaching complied with the Act.

The inspectors were also mandated ‘to evaluate the education standards in ... schools’ (Education Act, 1998, Section 13). The 1998 Education Act (Section 13) put a very onerous responsibility on the Inspectorate in terms of evaluating the performance and operation of schools and centres of education, and evaluating their quality and effectiveness. The quality and effectiveness of individual teachers was also under the remit of the Inspectorate, as well as the quality and effectiveness of the provision of education in the State, including comparison with relevant international practice and standards, and reporting to the Minister (1998 Education Act, Section 13). The Inspectorate was also tasked with conducting research in education and providing support to the Minister in the formulation of policy (1998 Education Act, Section 13).

The Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU), part of the Inspectorate, played a major role in implementing the changes which resulted from the 1998 Education Act. According to Stack (cited in Coolahan and O'Donovan, 2009, p.271), its remit was:

To undertake research and give advice on best practice in evaluation, to prepare annual inspection plans, devise how best Whole School Evaluation could be conducted, analyse inspection reports, follow-up on issues arising, maintain a data base on all inspections, provide support for school planning and school self-review, provide professional input to the Department's Annual Report, and publish reports on aspects of the functioning of the education system.

By this time, the Inspectorate had three functions: to evaluate; to create quality standards; and to develop policy to support the education system (Coolahan et al., 2017). The view was that the Inspectorate was best placed to evaluate all three dimensions of schools, not only because of their skill set, but also because they were *au fait* with the aims of the curriculum. Thus, it was perceived that the Inspectorate had the skills to both evaluate a school and offer recommendations in order that the school would move along a given continuum to school improvement.

2.8 The Influence of Accountability in Education Policy

It is evident that in the 1990s, Ireland was influenced by trends in the international globalised economy. Accountability and transparency were introduced into both private enterprise and the State sector (Ball, 1993, Epstein, 1993, Bush, 2005). McNamara et al. (2020) show that in the decades preceding the year 2000, the concept of quality assurance in terms of school evaluation had not yet filtered into first- and second-level education in Ireland. However, that changed following the publication of the 1998 Education Act.

Accountability of schools, in the form of School Self Evaluation (SSE), was first mooted in the proposal by the Inspectorate that Irish secondary schools should be involved in the internal evaluation of their own schools. SSE was made mandatory in 2012, so no school could avoid the self-evaluation process. According to McNamara et al. (2022), there were three reasons for the rise of self-evaluation: the rise of the OECD as an economic influence; the recognised requirement by all inspectorates for the need for more accountability; and the move of the Irish Inspectorate towards the self-managing of schools, in the form of School Self Evaluation (SSE). Education became very closely linked with the economy, and was viewed as being a tool for upskilling the students to keep the Irish economy competitive and buoyant.

Anderson (2005) suggests that educators work within three types of accountability systems in external inspection, often at the same time. The first is the compliance-oriented system, where they are held accountable for adherence to the mandated rules, issued in the form of circular letters (CL), set out by the Department of Education. The second is the professional-accountability system, where educators are held accountable for their teaching; and the third is the performance-based accountability, where educators are accountable for student learning and outcomes to the public. Internal evaluation has a different focus but according to the Inspectorate (LAOS, 2003, LAOS, 2016, LAOS, 2022, SSE 2012, SSE, 2022) is of no less importance.

According to Simons (2013), it is the internal evaluation of school practices that provides insights into the educational experiences of students, which are not measured by test data. Internal evaluation is carried out solely by staff internal to the school. The aim of internal evaluation is development, according to Simons (2013). Schools are accountable for the

performance and outcomes of their students. Teaching and learning are key, as is school self-evaluation. Schools are also accountable to the public, parents and the community for the quality of the education they offer to young people in the area.

2.9 Accountability – Conclusions

The influence of accountability on inspection is pervasive. It is obvious that the quality of the schooling being offered to students is carefully evaluated in the external evaluation process. Equally, the SSE process evaluates the capacity of school management and staff to continually improve and therefore offer the students a quality education. According to Van Hoof and Van Petegem (2007), the use of the two methodologies is beneficial for estimating quality assurance and accountability.

2.10 Surveillance of Teachers – Performativity

According to O'Brien et al. (2017; 2019), many national and State systems have adopted test-based, numbers-driven accountability in schools. This is affirmed in studies such as those carried out by Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013), and Lingard et al. (2015). Ireland is no exception. The focus on teacher performativity or productivity is considerable as education systems put increasing value on outputs and efficiencies over inputs and processes, thus putting teachers under immense pressure (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). To promote the school in the community, Ball (2003) suggests that schools must accept a corporate culture where the good of the organisation comes before the good of the individual workers (teachers). Thus, conformity with the system becomes a moral imperative in schools, which is not what schools and teaching are about, according to Ball (2003).

The surveillance of teachers, according to Skerritt (2020, p.1), is a product of ‘accountability-driven and business-like schools.’ He contends that teachers in the past were surveilled by inspectors only, while now they are surveilled by all the stakeholders in education, including other school staff, boards of management, students, parents, the local community and the Inspectorate. Skerritt (2020) suggests that this is a result of the rise of school autonomy and devolved forms of governance, which are in place to achieve optimum academic results. Teaching methodologies must now be continuously upgraded to meet the needs of learners, which he suggests can be an onerous challenge for some teachers. Skerritt (2020) maintains that sometimes the ‘old way’ of teaching is no longer effective, nor does it meet the skill set or knowledge base required as societal needs evolve.

Teachers can sometimes feel threatened by changes in education systems and changes in evaluation. Skerritt (2020) contends that teachers face three different types of surveillance: vertical surveillance, or top-down observation by management in the form of lesson observation; bottom-up surveillance, in the form of students’ voices on the professional capability of the teacher; and horizontal surveillance, by parents, who comment on the teacher’s performance, or by colleagues who visit the teacher’s class as part of peer observation. Skerritt (2020) asserts that teachers are aware that surveillance takes place at all times; however, not all teachers are willing participants of their own surveillance. Taylor (2013, p.11) asserts that teachers ‘occupy a dichotomous position of being both the ‘watchers’ and the ‘watched’ – they become the ‘watched-watchers’.

2.11 School Plan and the School Development Planning Initiative 1999

Schools in the Irish education system and school staff did not tend to engage in collaborative planning or evaluation processes until the late 1990s (Lynch and O’Riordan, 1996). However,

following the 1998 Education Act it became national policy that all schools prepare a school plan (Education Act 1998, Section 1V). This made school development planning compulsory. McNamara et al. (2002, p. 202) observe that there was rapid change in the Irish education system following the 1998 Act, due to the influential research at home and research from abroad, namely, the OECD and the EU, which moved school development planning from ‘the periphery to the centre of education policy in a very short time’. The school plan consisted of a written document outlining the school’s educational philosophy and how it proposed to achieve its aims. The introduction of the school plan was a change of emphasis in evaluation, as schools were now held to account to evaluate their own performance as part of an on-going improvement process.

The School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) was established in 1999 by the Department of Education ‘to stimulate and strengthen a culture of collaborative development planning in schools, with a view to further promoting school improvement and effectiveness’ (SDPI, n.d.). The Inspectorate’s input in this initiative was significant in providing templates and slideshow (Powerpoint) presentations for schools. The value of the input from the Inspectorate into this process was significant (Coolahan and O’Donovan, 2009). McNamara et al. (2002) identify a trend towards openness and accountability in all State institutions in Ireland during this period, and assert that this change led to an acceptance on the part of educationalists that whole-school planning and internal evaluation were a means of promoting school effectiveness and school improvement, and thus were to be embraced rather than feared.

2.12 Whole School Evaluation (WSE) 1999 – A New Model of School Evaluation

Whole School Evaluation was developed by the Department of Education as ‘a developmental model to serve the trinitarian purposes of school improvement, school development and school

effectiveness' (DES, 1999, p.17). It was agreed by the Inspectorate that the evaluation was to be specifically targeted 'on the work of the school as a whole' and 'individual teachers would not be identified in the WSE reports' (McNamara et al., 2002, p. 205). It was further agreed by the Inspectorate that 'the data obtained during the evaluation would not be used to compare schools locally or nationally' and would not be employed as the material 'to construct league tables of schools' (McNamara et al., 2002, p. 205). There was also agreement by the Inspectorate that 'the unique contextual factors of each school' would be considered during the evaluation (McNamara et al., 2002, p. 205), to be fair to all schools.

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) was implemented in the Irish education system in 2004, following a pilot scheme which began in 1998 (McNamara and O'Hara, 2012, p.7). The evaluation process is designed 'to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided in the state by recognised schools and centres for education' (Education Act 1998, section 7(2) (b)). The pilot project on Whole School Evaluation (WSE) was completed in 1999. In late 2002, there was a surprise announcement by the then Minister for Education, Mr Noel Dempsey, that WSE would proceed and that it would be operational very soon (McNamara and O'Hara, 2005). It was rolled out in 2004 on a national basis.

2.13 The Cromien Report 2000

The Department of Education commissioned consultants' reports on its internal structures, staffing, and mode of operation, as part of its accountability agenda. One of these reports was the Cromien Report of 2000.

The Cromien Report (2000, p.42) had a chapter devoted to the work of the Inspectorate, stating the following:

We consider that qualitative assurance constitutes the core function of the Inspectorate. The core function comprises two aspects, evaluation of provision (e.g. inspection and Whole School Evaluation) and policy formulation. However, there is a general view that the Inspectorate's capacity to focus on these core objectives is hampered by its involvement in a wide range of other activities.

It is noteworthy that the function of standards in the role of the Inspectorate is not mentioned. This is important in terms of the functions of the Inspectorate, as up to this point standards were one of the three key functions of the Inspectorate.

2.14 Global Influence on Education Reform from 2000 Onwards

The OECD (2005) has identified competence as the core of education, including the knowledge and the skills required to prepare for the future needs of societies. Through the Programme for International Assessments (PISA), introduced in Ireland since 2000, the OECD provides a significant amount of data on student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science (Martens and Niemann, 2013). As rating and ranking are used as standards of comparison, every country can now see their rating and can compare it to that of other countries. As a result of this, comparison and competition at a global level has been used as a basis for initiating discourse related to educational-policy reforms in each country (Grek and Ozga, 2009; Martens and Niemann, 2013; Brown et al., 2016).

The OECD education-reform policy, which is guided by the PISA findings, has resulted in strengthening the control and management of a central authority in each state. Governance

through data is of great significance in the European education-policy space. Accountability, productivity, and control go hand in hand. According to Lessinger (1977, p.154), when a school system performs as planned, it is 'under control'. This is the ideal. The power and influence of the OECD in terms of the PISA results cannot be understated, nor can the standardisation of PISA as the educational ideal. The Irish Inspectorate is influenced by the standards set by the PISA reports, and therefore the reports and recommendations of Whole School Evaluations have been strongly influenced by international standards and policies.

The Irish education system aspires to be a quality and well-functioning system, but from time to time, the system falls below the required standard. Thus, the accountability and productivity narrative clearly influence the Inspectorate in that the onus for the system staying on track lies firmly on the shoulders of the Inspectorate.

2.15 Conclusion

The Inspectorate in the 1980s was affected by a deep economic recession in Ireland. There was insufficient staff to carry out the many tasks that needed to be completed. Very few inspections took place in the secondary sector, with the exception of inspecting new teachers during periods of initial employment probation. The feedback of these inspections was solely given to the principal of the school. Furthermore, some inspectors felt that there was a lack of appreciation of their work by those in the Departments of Education and Finance. In sum, the Inspectorate may have felt undervalued and perhaps devalued during this time.

On a more positive note, from the mid-1980s, the Inspectorate were given the opportunity to interact with other Inspectorates who were part of the OECD. This engagement proved to be very significant for the Irish Inspectorate as it facilitated a percolation of ideas on practice, and

contributed to discussions on such issues as the role and function of the Inspectorate and the quality of education. The emerging role of the Irish second-level Inspectorate was to actively promote the quality of education, for example, in teaching and learning, and in management and leadership.

The 1990s was a period of economic prosperity in Ireland but also a period of major appraisal, analysis, and policy formation in terms of inspection and the Inspectorate. There was an unprecedented raft of legislation, culminating in the 1998 Education Act, which was highly significant for the Irish Inspectorate. Increasingly, during the 1990s, education was seen as a critical issue for national policy in terms of the overall economy. Ireland's continued economic growth was predicated on students being trained for certain jobs. The influence of international bodies such as the EU and the OECD was significant, and continues to be so in terms of educational policy, curricula and standards linking all three to economic growth. The education system in Ireland was re-imagined during this time in ways designed to complement the commitment to the sustainability of Ireland's economic growth. Increased engagement and awareness in education in Irish society meant that the Inspectorate was under public scrutiny to keep economic growth on track within an improving education structure.

Section 2: The Inspectorate in Transition 2003 to 2018

2.16 Introduction

According to McNamara and O'Hara (2012), schools and teachers in Ireland have a long tradition of being evaluated by a centralised Inspectorate, which is part of the Department of Education. However, they contend that by the early 1990s, the system had broken down remarkably, with inspection in secondary schools almost at a complete halt. With the introduction of the 1998 Education Act, this issue was addressed and the Inspectorate now had a statutory quality-assurance obligation as regards education provision, as set out in section 13 of the Education Act (1998).

This proved to be a significant change. The Inspectorate published a document in 2003 entitled *Looking at Our School* (LAOS), which outlined the inspection framework, a new template for school inspection. Even with the Inspectorate providing in-service for principals in introducing the framework to secondary schools, LAOS proved to be quite a complex document to negotiate for both senior management and staff, and the proposed changes in inspection were seen to be challenging for schools in the absence of further training.

2.17 *Looking at Our School* (LAOS, 2003)

There is a general consensus in the literature that getting the balance between internal and external evaluation right is crucial but complex (SICI, 2005, Part 4). The *LAOS* (2003) framework presented five areas of self-evaluation: the quality of school management; school planning; curriculum provision; learning and teaching in subjects; and support for students (DES, 2003). These five areas were then sub-divided into 143 themes for self-evaluation (LAOS, 2003). Schools were meant to use self-evaluation (SSE) to gather evidence and rate

themselves on a four-part rating scale, which in turn would provide evidence for Departmental inspections. The continuum on that scale consisted of the following four levels: 'significant strengths; strengths outweigh weaknesses; weaknesses outweigh strengths; significant/major weaknesses' (LAOS, 2003, p. x).

As part of the inspection process, inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning, interacting with students when appropriate, while examining student work including homework. Evidence schedules were completed by the inspectors based on evidence gathered and judgements noted, which formed the basis of the inspection report. A background review of the school was undertaken by the inspectors prior to the commencement of the inspection, including attainment of the school in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate State examinations.

The Inspectorate may have anticipated schools providing data on performance of the school. However, the collection and recording of such data would only have been possible if schools had the capacity for undertaking internal evaluation. McNamara and O'Hara (2012, p.25) noted that principals and teachers had neither the time nor the training to implement self-evaluation (SSE). McNamara and O'Hara (2012, p. 13) further noted that 'the capacity to follow up inspection recommendations without further external assistance' was not commonplace. It became evident that 'the concept of on-going self-evaluation has not taken hold in schools', and that the main reasons for this may have centred around the lack of guidelines in LAOS (2003) relating to 'criteria or research methods that might inform judgements', which resulted in 'data-free evaluation in practice' (McNamara and O'Hara, 2008, p. 175). Furthermore, McNamara and O'Hara (2008, p. 175) noted, 'without such guidelines and the provision of training and research support for schools, the situation is not likely to change'.

Brown et al. (2017, p. 74) opined that schools did not have ‘the skill-set required to gather and analyse data to any significant degree’. According to McNamara and O’Hara (2006, p. 574), other weaknesses in *LAOS* (2003) relate to ‘the extensive nature of the document with its 143 themes; there was no formal contact through interviews or questionnaires with parents and students during the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) process at this time; inspection reports were not made public by the DES; the DES did not take responsibility for improving the shortcomings identified’. The framework was based on a dual model of external and internal evaluation (*LAOS*, 2003). The underlying premise was that external evaluation (WSE) would be interwoven with an internal review (SSE). According to McNamara et al. (2020, p. 167), ‘this represents a notable shift by the Inspectorate as up until this, inspection had been entirely external’. Although *LAOS* (2003) put the focus on SSE rather than external inspection, McNamara and O’Hara (2012, p. 18) state that ‘the real goal was a system of external inspection, with a pretence of an element of self-evaluation’.

Despite these shortcomings, Brown et al. (2017, p. 74) highlight that *LAOS* (2003) ‘did serve one significant purpose, namely a closer alignment between internal and external concepts of quality’. This set the groundwork for the future development of inspection in Ireland over the next two decades. Before the publication of *LAOS* (2003), internal evaluation was not part of the inspection model. Thus, the publication of this quality framework to inform school self-evaluation may be seen as ‘a starting point’ in ‘creating a culture of SSE in schools’ (McNamara et al., 2021, p. 3).

2.18 Whole School Evaluation 2004-2006

In terms of external evaluation, the impact of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) as a model of external evaluation was highly significant when it was introduced in 2004 on a national basis in the Republic of Ireland. This new model of inspection allowed the Inspectorate to assess the quality assurance of a school in greater detail, as previously, the Inspectorate relied on the results of State examinations (the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate) for such information. Results of the State examinations are still used by the Inspectorate to assess quality assurance; however, WSE offered another lens to stand alongside the benchmark of examination results, integrating elements such as school climate; support for students; school context; quality of teaching and learning; and quality of school management.

The WSE reports carried out before 2006 were not published; however, since 2006, all inspection reports are now published on the DES website (DES, 2006). The then Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin, stated that ‘the publication of the first set of school inspection reports marks an important step in making valuable information available on schools’ (Hanafin, 2006).

2.19 Critique of the Process of Inspections by Incoming Chief Inspector

Harold Hislop was appointed to the role of Chief Inspector in 2010. While he agreed that the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) and subject-inspection models established the practice of external evaluation in schools, they proved in his opinion to be ‘incapable of delivering adequate inspection coverage across the school system ... the models were children of their time’ (Hislop, 2012, p.14). His view was that the inspection template was developed in ‘a highly collaborative manner’, believing this to be a means ‘to secure its acceptance’. He further commented that the inspections were ‘too time-consuming, over-elaborate, and lacked judgement’, due to the ‘overly-long and complex reports’ (Hislop, 2012, p.15). He further

contended that the WSE model demanded that every element of the work of the school be evaluated in what he termed ‘exhaustive detail’ (Hislop, 2012, p.15). In his opinion, the nature of the template led to the inspectors having little freedom to judge what was or was not likely to be important (Hislop, 2012).

Under the direction of Chief Inspector Hislop, the remit of the work of the Inspectorate since 2010 ‘has radically changed the way in which external evaluations are carried out to improve inspection coverage’ (Hislop, 2012, p.15). A wide range of new models were introduced from 2012 onwards, which ranged from short, unannounced inspections known as incidental inspections (known as the ‘drive by’ in colloquial language) to longer and more detailed inspections, as well as more targeted and thematic inspections, for example, programme evaluation, evaluation of action planning for improvement in DEIS schools, and evaluation of centres of education.

The risk-based model of inspections was introduced in 2011. Hislop, in his Chief Inspector’s report (DES, 2013, p. 24), noted that:

Having a range of inspection models available has allowed us to target a proportion of our inspection activity where the risk to students’ learning is greatest. For example, information acquired during short, unannounced inspections can now be used to highlight where further, more intensive inspections are needed.

The Follow Through Inspection (FTI) model was introduced in 2012 for all schools in the system, replacing the follow-up inspections that were previously carried out only on ‘schools with very serious weaknesses’ (Brown et al., 2018, p. 81). The Follow Through Inspection focussed on whether key recommendations were actioned in the intervening period to enhance

the quality of education in the school. According to Hislop (2012, p. 15), the inspectors' time in school is now mainly spent on 'the observation of practice and the provision of feedback to teachers.' As a result of all these changes, the Inspectorate was able to carry out varied levels of inspection in 600 out of 740 post-primary schools in 2011, despite the public-sector moratorium at that time that had led to staff reductions in the Inspectorate (Hislop, 2012). With all the new, shorter models of inspection coming on stream, the Chief Inspector (Hislop, 2012, p.16) noted regarding WSE:

We continue to use the more intensive inspection models in all types of schools – both those where we have concerns and those where we believe practice will be very good or excellent – for a number of reasons, not least because we believe inspectors need to evaluate very good practice as well as poorer practice regularly. There can be no doubt that improving inspection coverage has been achieved, and that the use of frequent inspection has improved the quality of education in Ireland.

2.20 Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011 and School Self Evaluation (SSE) 2012

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy as part of School Self Evaluation (SSE) resulted from the 'poor' performance of Ireland in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in reading and maths in 2009. The results revealed that no real improvement had occurred in Irish students' performances in mathematics and reading since Ireland first participated in PISA in 2000 (Skerritt et al., 2021, p. 5). As a result of these 2009 PISA results, a national literacy and numeracy strategy was devised, with significant input from the Inspectorate amongst many other interested groups, both those involved in education and beyond (Skerritt et al., 2021, p. 5). The ensuing publication was entitled *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011a). To improve attainment levels in reading and maths, the Department of Education required thereafter that all schools should 'engage in robust self-evaluation and put in place a

three-year school improvement plan which includes specific targets for the promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy' (DES, 2011a, p.82). The Department considered SSE to be a key strategy in helping to improve literacy and numeracy in the Republic of Ireland (DES, 2011a). The onus was thus clearly on secondary schools to use School Self Evaluation to improve on both literacy and numeracy skills, so that future PISA scores would improve.

Ball et al. (2011, p.3) suggest that policy texts do not come with specific instructions for all types of schools; they opine that they are usually written:

In relation to the best of all possible schools, schools that only exist in the fevered imaginations of politicians, civil servants, and advisers and in relation to fantastical contexts. These texts cannot simply be implemented.

This could very well be the rationale for the fact that SSE has proved to be difficult to implement in Ireland, because the text has to be translated for implementation in every school, taking full account of the particular history and context of each school, without the necessary resources being made available in each case (Ball et al., 2011).

Commenting on SSE becoming mandatory in 2012; Brown et al. (2017, p.72) claim that it is a policy shift that 'represents a major departure from the primacy of external inspection which was the cornerstone of school evaluation in Ireland before 2012'. According to MacBeath (2006), the theory of SSE was that teachers and schools would have the freedom to devise their own improvement plan, which in turn would foster collaboration. However, no such freedom was afforded to Irish secondary schools to formulate their own improvement plan. The themes for SSE in Ireland were prescriptive as they were based solely on the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011a).

The research carried out by Brown et al. (2017, p.71) suggests that in relation to SSE from 2012 onwards, ‘a significant majority of principals are of the view that principals, deputy principals and teachers require more training to carry out SSE’. Research capacity was certainly a lacuna in almost all schools. According to research by Brown et al. (2017, pp.89-90), a majority of principals believed that ‘SSE results in better teaching, learning and management’; and furthermore, the research found that due to the implementation of SSE, ‘there has been an increase in collaboration, reflective practice and dialogue evaluation’. In sum, according to Brown et al. (2017, p.92), positives from SSE include the following:

There has been a significant increase in distributed leadership, as subcommittees have increased staff engagement and ownership of the SSE process. Furthermore, leadership has become much ‘less hierarchical’, and there are far more teams working together on various aspects of self-evaluation.

The advantages of implementing SSE did not permeate to all schools. There were costs associated with employing outside facilitators to help train the staff (if it was not available in-house), which schools in the free-fees sector could rarely afford. There is evidence of further negative consequences resulting from the SSE process (Brown et al., 2017, p.93) such as increased stress, increased workload, and lack of SSE resources. Principals have referenced the poor timing of mandatory SSE implementation, for ‘this was the era of reduced salaries, reduced middle-management posts of responsibility, and extensive new initiatives’ (Brown et al., 2017). Nonetheless, many principals found that focusing on literacy and numeracy led to ‘clear targets and measurable improvements in achievement’, and noted that there was ‘more open discussion about the outcomes of public examinations’ as a result of the SSE process (Brown et al., 2017, p. 93). Although the positives outweigh the negatives, due to the increased

levels of stress combined with initiative fatigue, ‘it is difficult to envisage that schools could continue to put so much effort into the process without specific resources being made available’ (Brown et al., 2017, p. 93).

Brady (2016) argues that the framework for self-evaluation in England and Ireland is inherited from the inspectorates’ criteria for good and bad teaching, an issue similarly voiced by MacBeath (2006), and McNamara and O’ Hara (2008). The framework for SSE is not generated by the schools, but by the Inspectorate. According to Brady (2016, p.531), the real standards that matter in teaching cannot be made into a checklist as part of a policy framework:

They can only be worked out within a community of practice, within which we can develop reasonable standards for teaching, standards which may, and should be subject to change, such as a community of practice is ...

Both Simons (2015) and Brady (2016) agree that SSE is diminishing what it means to be a teacher in England, with Brady (2016) proposing that it may well be similar for teachers in Ireland.

2.21 Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL)

2012

A new mode of school inspection was introduced in 2012, called Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL). The purpose of WSE-MLL according to the Inspectorate is ‘to evaluate key aspects of the work of the post-primary school and to promote school improvement’ (DES, 2011b, p.6). In addition, ‘the process aims to facilitate quality assurance of schools and to enhance quality through fostering school improvement’ (DES, 2011b, p.5).

The guidelines state clearly that the WSE-MLL evaluation framework is based on LAOS 2003 (DES, 2011b). A WSE-MLL inspection has four areas of enquiry, namely, quality of school leadership and management; quality of teaching and learning; implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations; the school's self-evaluation process; and capacity for school improvement (DES, 2011b). Although the WSE-MLL model has been streamlined since 2016, as McNamara et al. (2020) point out, it is still an in-depth inspection, a robust quality-assurance mechanism conducted in a coherent, rigorous and professional manner by the Inspectorate. If a school is found lacking in any area of the quality-assurance process, outside of stating it, the Inspectorate does not provide the school with on-going professional assistance to address issues raised, which may be a shortcoming (Mathews, 2010).

McNamara and O'Hara (2012, p. 19) highlight the main differences between *LAOS* (2003) and WSE-MLL. Firstly, in WSE-MLL, schools have to show more evidence of SSE and its impact on school improvement. Secondly, the inspectors survey parents and students; and thirdly, future inspections will be risk-based rather than cyclical. Brady (2016) considers that WSE-MLL left little room for the teacher to be present in the evaluation and as such argues that it was hugely prescriptive. Brady (2016) further asserts that WSE-MLL did not give the opportunity for any teacher to self-reflect, and there was no room for them to do so spontaneously, as they had to use the step-by-step *LAOS* framework which was provided. The document imposed its own definitions on the practitioner, and produced detailed tabulated diagrams of what the process of SSE should aim to achieve (Brady, 2016). It was so prescriptive that the whole process may have been reduced to 'read the framework and you will understand the process', which is clearly not the case (Brady, 2016).

2.22 *Looking at Our School (LAOS) 2016 – A Vision for Our Education System*

According to the Inspectorate, the rationale for publishing *LAOS* (2016), which was an updated version of *LAOS* (2003), was ‘to support the efforts of teachers and school leaders, as well as the school system more generally, to strive for excellence in our schools’ (LAOS, 2016, p. 5). Richard Bruton, the then Minister for Education, suggested that the quality framework, *LAOS* (2016, p.5) was designed:

To underpin both school self-evaluation and school inspections. The idea of a quality framework in any area is to provide standards that can help to assess how good practice is and, very importantly, to point the way towards improvement where needed.

The then Chief Inspector, Hislop (2012, p.9), used the term ‘smart regulation’ to describe this combination approach to inspection in Ireland:

Such regulation comes in the form of internal evaluation (SSE) and external evaluation (school inspection). External evaluation drives and supports the process of SSE.

Looking at Our School (2016) outlined the most important work in schools, namely teaching and learning and leadership and management (LAOS, 2016). The quality framework, *LAOS* (2016), is designed to give schools a clear indication of what good and very good practices in a school look like. The document allows schools to look at their own practices and to identify what they are doing well, and what aspects of the school’s practices could be further developed to improve the students’ learning experiences and outcomes (LAOS, 2016, p.5).

The Inspectorate also provided samples of standards that were deemed to be effective practice and highly effective practice. Schools were asked to examine both standards and decide where they were on the continuum, and if not at ‘effective practice’, to ensure that the school made

effective practice a key goal by using the quality framework (LAOS, 2016). The statements of practice informed school inspections and continue to do so. The quality framework according to the Inspectorate provides a very clear picture of what quality teaching and learning, and quality leadership and management look like (LAOS, 2016). Hislop (2017) suggests that LAOS (2016) is intended to encourage schools to move their practices from good to excellent.

It is further considered that as a quality framework it is daunting, complex, and extensive. Brady's (2016, p. 11) view is that if we are committed to certain standards or criteria of teaching imposed by an external body (the Inspectorate), then we might be operating in a 'technicist way', and that 'the criteria or standards of good teaching arise from a specific, occasioned political view of the then-purpose of education'. Brady (2016) suggests that this position is far from ideal. MacBeath (1999, p. 2) emphasises the need for a balance between internal and external evaluation in all educational settings, since when that 'point of balance is achieved, people are enabled to do their job most effectively because they experience intrinsic satisfaction as well as extrinsic recognition and reward'.

2.23 School Self Evaluation (SSE) 2016

In the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016 – A Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2016* (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006), teachers undertook to establish and maintain systems whereby efficiency and effectiveness could be quantified.

The School Self-Evaluation (SSE) framework that was introduced in Ireland in 2016 not only equips teachers but also the whole school (including principal and deputy principal) to evaluate the quality of whole-school activities for the benefit of the learners. Fidler (1997) advises schools that to be effective, they should be doing the right thing, *right*. In terms of SSE, that

entails using appropriate means in deciding *what the right thing to do is* in terms of internal evaluation, and ensuring that the outcomes are in line with stated expectations. SSE cannot replace external evaluation because, although SSE focuses on pedagogy, external evaluation is a control mechanism to ensure that schools are accountable for quality education provision. It is clear throughout *LAOS* (2016) that SSE ‘is not going to supersede inspection’, and that school inspections will continue to make schools accountable for the quality of the service they offer to the learners in their school (McNamara et al., 2020, p. 172).

In-service on SSE since 2016 has placed the focus on data-informed decision making (DIDM). As McNamara et al. (2021, p. 3) point out, the main difference between *LAOS* (2016)/SSE (2012) and SSE (2016) is ‘that there is now a greater emphasis placed on DIDM in the areas that schools evaluate’. The introduction of DIDM may have placed an added burden on schools, who may already be challenged by policy overload. McNamara et al. (2021, p. 4) share McBeath’s view (2005, 2006) that SSE is driven by an economic logic, an accountability logic, and an improvement logic. They apply this view to the Irish inspection process, concluding that ‘while improvement is predominantly promoted in official discourse, it is the accountability and economic logics that dominate’ in Ireland (McNamara et al., 2021, p.1). Furthermore, McNamara et al. (2021, p.11) voice a concern that this ‘could potentially undermine the improvement logic and teachers’ sense of professional responsibility’. Although the main focus of SSE is on improvement, in practice it has elements of accountability and adherence to a prescribed quality framework.

Ikemoto and Marsh (2007) describe how data can be used for three main purposes by school leaders and teachers: school development purposes (to inform policy), instructional purposes (to inform learning and teaching), and accountability purposes (analysing results for all the

stakeholders). Using data as a school-improvement mechanism ‘is an aspect of the widespread culture of performativity in education’ (O’Brien et al., 2017, p. 1). According to Earl and Katz (2006), it is important that school leaders use data not as a surveillance instrument but in the service of improvement.

The attitude of teachers to data use is of major importance in order for progress in data use to take place, as a negative attitude can be a major obstacle (to both SSE and WSE) (O’Brien et al., 2019). Furthermore, many teachers believe that they do not understand the rudiments of data use, nor how to translate data into practice (Datnow and Hubbard, 2016). Ongoing professional development for teachers in data literacy is essential for school improvement, and must be part of the Inspectorate’s present and future agenda.

2.24 Conclusion

This section explored the background and introduction of the whole-school inspection models from 2003 to 2016. The influence of PISA and the OECD cannot be overestimated in benchmarking the quality of the Irish education system with those of other European countries. The stated aims of both external and internal evaluations were examined in terms of school development, accountability, school effectiveness and school improvement. The conclusion arrived at is that both internal and external evaluation is most effective when properly constituted and resourced. Both processes in tandem are key contributors to enhancing the on-going quality of a national education system.

SSE was considered by the Inspectorate to be a most effective tool to allow schools to take control of aspects of their own development, so much so that, since 2012, it is now compulsory for all schools in Ireland to engage in SSE. Both internal and external evaluation together with

inspection reports provide valuable data, which can be built into the School Self Evaluation process, while recommendations from inspection reports inform and guide the process of School Self Evaluation. Inspectors are also informed by schools through SSE regarding the urgent priorities of the school in terms of teaching and learning, as well as managing and leading.

The literature highlights both the successes and the challenges connected with implementing internal and external inspection. McNamara et al. (2020, p.16), referring to the last twenty years of inspection policy in Ireland, state that ‘it is a rare example of what can be achieved by steady policy implementation over a sustained period of time’. Notwithstanding the fact that the school-inspection framework or template has moved along the continuum influenced by the link with international agencies, and international inspectorates, the purpose of schooling is not only to meet society’s demands for economic and social skills, but is importantly linked to a personal sense of identity, self-worth, reliance, well-being, and enablement. The aim of inspection reports is to mirror this purpose.

Section 3 The Theoretical Framework: Educational Change

2.25 Introduction to The Theoretical Framework: Educational Change

Fullan et al. (2005, p. 54) discuss change knowledge, the understanding and insight about the process of change and the key elements that make for successful change. They maintain that the absence of it ensures failure. The eight key drivers of educational change that Fullan et al. (2005, p. 54) maintain are absolutely crucial are: engaging people's moral purposes; building capacity; understanding the change process; developing cultures for learning; developing cultures of evaluation; focusing on leadership for change; fostering coherence-making; cultivating development at school and state level.

The first key driver of educational change is moral purpose. Fullan et al. (2005, p. 54) insist that moral purpose has to be front and centre in educational change and they are very clear about its role: 'in education moral purpose involves committing to raise the bar and close the gap in student achievement'. The focus has to be placed on those students for whom the 'school system has been less effective' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 54). Moral purpose is exhibited by school leaders whose aim is to make a noticeable difference in their students' lives, according to Fullan (2002). Fullan (1993, p. 2) contends that 'moral purpose – or making a difference – concerns bringing about improvements. It is, in other words, a change theme'; he further asserts that collaborative work cultures and developing an increased repertoire of skills can build 'greater change capacity'. Barber and Fullan (2005, p.1) contend that 'the central moral purpose consists of constantly improving student achievement and ensuring that achievement gaps, wherever they exist, are narrowed'.

The literature on educational change has found evidence of the importance of moral purpose amongst leaders (Bezzina, 2012; Ramalepe, 2016; MacBeath, 2005). Donohoo (2018) posits that through collective actions, teachers can help improve students' academic achievements, and that this collective efficacy is central to the success of educational change in this area. Harris and Jones (2019, p. 123) argue that the 'literature on educational change reinforces the centrality of teacher agency, collaboration and leadership as a core influence upon improved learner outcomes'. Ramalepe (2016, p. 1774) asserts that moral purpose is 'one of the fundamental necessities for bringing about change and improvement in student learning and achievement'. Ramalepe (2016, p. 1774) further contends that 'there is a moral purpose at the centre of relationship-building processes'; in addition, he contends that moral purpose underscores the 'whole-school vision for academic success', as this vision 'focuses on the achievement of all learners'.

The literature posits that moral purpose must be translated into practice if it is to impact school improvement (Bezzina, 2012; Ramalepe, 2016; Fullan, 2010). Distributed leadership is seen as a main catalyst for school improvement and for translating moral purpose into practice (MacBeath, 2005; Ramalepe, 2016; Bezzina, 2007, 2012; Fullan, 2002, 2011). Building teams, working collaboratively, showing respect and trust, are all elements of moral purpose described by Fullan (2002, 2011), Bezzina (2007, 2012), and Ramalepe (2016).

The literature highlights that values and ethics inform moral purpose, and in turn influence student behaviour and learning outcomes (Ramalepe, 2016; Bezzina, 2012; Fullan, 1993). Bezzina (2012, p. 252) asserts that 'when a school genuinely holds particular values, those values should be visible in both the life and the rhetoric of the school. They should be evident in classrooms and what leaders do, and should shape the learning outcomes of students.'

Bezzina (2012, p. 252) further contends that ‘the critical issue is not so much having one set of values that would apply to all schools, but rather that in any given school there is an explicit and owned value platform’. Fullan (1993, p. 1) asserts that ‘teaching at its core is a moral profession’.

The second key driver of educational change, building capacity, involves ‘policies, strategies, resources and actions’, which foster effective collaboration amongst the entire school community in the pursuit of change. This change must be on-going and be part of a new culture of work that incorporates ‘developing new knowledge, skills, and competencies’ (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 55). Building capacity refers to actions taken that increase the professional expertise, skills and abilities of teachers and leaders in a school. Researchers including O’Brien et al. (2017, 2019) and Burner (2018) describe the importance of teachers and leaders improving their professional expertise. Ongoing professional development that is collaborative is a main factor that strengthens ‘the implementation and sustainability of educational change’ (Burner, 2018, p. 130).

The third key driver of educational change is understanding the change process. According to Fullan et al. (2005, p. 55), ‘the change process is about establishing the condition for continuous improvement in order to persist and overcome inevitable barriers to reform’. An inevitable part of the change process is referred to as the ‘implementation dip’ by Fullan (2002, p. 17); this describes the difficulties or barriers encountered when trying to introduce something new. Burner (2018, pp. 130-131) describes the factors which help to overcome the barriers to reform: he advises that ‘teachers need motivation and justification to change’ so that those involved will see and understand the relevance of change. He also advises that principals should allow time for reflection on change, including action research if possible; build trust and collective

responsibility; incorporate professional development into teachers' schedules; and promote teacher leadership.

The cultural-change principal works with others to develop many more leaders in the school; in turn these leaders will be able to sustain change when the principal leaves. Building relationships and teams is essential if the change process is to be successful. A significant aspect of the change process is called 're-culturing', which refers to transforming the culture of the school by 'changing what people in the organisation value and how they work together to accomplish it', according to Fullan (2002, p. 17). Shared vision and ownership are the outcomes of 'a quality change process' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 55). Moynihan and O'Donovan (2021, p.1) found that their research in Ireland revealed that 'principals are positively seeking to re-culture schools.'

The fourth key driver of educational change is developing cultures for learning: 'it involves a set of strategies designed for people to learn from each other and become collectively committed to improvement' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 55). The importance of professional dialogue during the entire change process is highlighted by Fullan et al. (2005, p. 55): 'one of the most powerful drivers of change involves learning from peers, especially those who are further along in implementing new ideas.' Sharing knowledge with colleagues is crucial if a change process is to be successful, and therefore professional relationships are essential.

The literature on instructional leadership concurs with the viewpoint of Fullan et al. (2005) regarding learning from peers; examples include instructional strategies, including peer observation (Bennett et al., 1991; Bennett and Rolheiser, 2001). Research in Irish schools by

Moynihan and O' Donovan (2021, p.15) revealed that 'school principals are the driving agents in providing the spaces and resources for collaborative practice'.

The fifth key driver of educational change is developing cultures of evaluation. This must be used in conjunction with a culture of learning. Assessment for learning – not just assessment of learning – must be used. According to Fullan et al. (2005, p. 56), 'assessment for learning incorporates accessing/gathering data on student learning; disaggregating data for more detailed understanding; developing action plans based on above data; being able to articulate and discuss performance with parents and external groups.' Important aspects of evaluation cultures include 'school based self-appraisal, meaningful use of external accountability data', which in turn can be used for both external and internal accountability purposes (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 56). Burner (2018, p. 127) describes how Black and Wiliam's 1998 review highlighted the positive effect that formative assessment has on students' learning, and stressed that is therefore an instance of effective educational change, which echoes Fullan's (2005) views on developing cultures of evaluation.

The sixth key driver of educational change is focusing on leadership for change, and 'there is no other driver as essential as leadership for sustainable reform' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). Fullan et al. (2005, p. 57) advocate distributed leadership, stating that 'leadership to be effective must spread throughout the organisation'. The creation of a culture of distributed leadership would be a significant legacy, as 'the main mark of a school principal at the end of his/her tenure is not just that individual's impact on student achievement, but rather how many leaders are left behind that can go even further' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). Mintzberg (2004, pp. 16-39) stated that 'successful managing is not about one's own success but about fostering success in others'; he further maintained that 'while managers have to make decisions, far more

important ... is what they do to enhance decision-making capabilities of others' (cited in Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). The cultural-change principal 'works to prepare the school to sustain and even advance reform after he or she departs', according to Fullan (2002, p. 17). Sustainable change requires the creation of many leaders and ensuring leadership succession (Fullan, 2002). According to Burner (2018, p. 130) 'teacher leadership has been found to be an effective contributor to educational change' and one of the main ways it does so is by 'enhancing the practice of other teacher colleagues'. The literature on distributed leadership reflects the opinion of Fullan et al. (2005) that effective leadership is spread throughout the school (Leithwood et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006; MacBeath, 2005).

The seventh key driver of educational change is fostering coherence-making. Fullan et al. (2005, p. 57) highlight the dangers of too many innovations in too short a time span; they maintain that 'change knowledge is required to render overload into greater coherence'. Coherence-making is an on-going and multifaceted process, since 'creating coherence is a never-ending proposition that involves alignment, connecting the dots, being clear about how the big picture fits together' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). Change is complex and therefore can lead to fragmentation and overload, necessitating a leader who can be clear about the direction the school is going in, and who can harness the energy of all the staff to go in the same right direction. Burner (2018, p. 129) concurs that change is complex, and he posits that 'in order to make change more effective, the tensions and contradictions have to be used as an asset rather than a hindrance'.

The eight key driver of educational change is cultivating development at school, district and state level. Fullan et al. (2005, p. 58) maintain that it is not enough just to change individuals; rather it is vital to change systems/organisations at school, district and state level. To do this

we must provide more learning in context, and we must know that ‘learning in context involves learning in the actual situations we want to change’ (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). ‘Learning in context’ refers to learning on the job and it helps to create new leaders and fosters professional development. This involves learning by doing in context, while at the same time learning about the conceptual insight into change leadership. Fullan (2005, pp. 4-5) argues that sustained change requires a system-level solution, which occurs at the level of the school, the district and the state.

2.26 Conclusion

Fullan’s theoretical framework of educational change was justified as the relevant framework for this study. Moral purpose was seen as key to changing the educational culture of the school. This framework scaffolded the changes necessary to improve the academic achievement of the students. This incorporated creating a culture of evaluation as well as a culture of collaboration within the school. Capacity building was prioritised in the pursuit of educational change. As outlined in more detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, leadership for change moved the school in this study from traditional isolationist practices to distributive leadership, which recognised that there were multiple leaders in a school. The cultural-change principal who saw the big picture engaged in a process of re-culturing, which involves transforming the culture of the school by changing what people value.

The important links to identity, self-worth, reliance, well-being and enablement were obvious in the themes that arose during the course of the inspections discussed throughout this thesis.

Section 4 Literature Review of the Themes which Arose Following the Inspections.

2.27 Introduction

The predominant themes and concepts which are relevant to this study include the following: Change and Resistance to Change; School Improvement; Streaming; Student Voice; School Climate.

2.28 Change and Resistance to Change

On the question of acceptance of school reform, Terhart (2013) suggests that although educational researchers, school reformers and educational developers assume that teachers and schools await their recommendations with bated breath, the majority of teachers and schools want to hear nothing of reform, innovation, new forms of teaching and so on.

According to Terhart (2013), the culture and convictions of educational administrators and reformers and the culture and convictions of teachers in the classrooms and staffrooms are diametrically opposed to one another. Terhart (2013, p.487) indeed suggests that many teachers display no zeal for innovation and that in fact they might well display ‘backlashes and hidden and even open forms of resistance or obstruction against innovation’. Terhart (2013, p. 487) also opines that that there might well be ironic contempt for the ‘experts’ coming in from outside (for example, inspectors) ‘who in the eyes of those at the shop floor level (i.e. the teachers) seem to be moving like elephants in a china shop: they cannot understand anything, they cannot change anything and they certainly cannot make a difference’.

Terhart (2013) suggests that teachers believe that if they hold out, then the ‘experts’ will be gone in a short time and that nothing will change. Terhart (2013) warns that the discussion on

teacher resistance is a very delicate endeavour. He claims that it is difficult because the topic of teacher resistance against school reform is a thorny issue, with moral connotations of perhaps not doing what is right, if teachers are not willing to accept change. However, he suggests that any educational reality can and needs to be improved. No school has the perfect environment, and all schools need to continue to improve.

It is generally accepted that school reform will never take place against the will of the teachers (Terhart, 2013). The problem with organisational change is that those at the top of the organisation want change but those lower down do not want that particular change. All theories of organisational change emphasise this theme of resistance to change/innovation (Harvey and Broyles, 2010; Ortiz, 2012, and Fullan (2009) describe change as war, but a war in disguise. They suggest that theories and programmes of change have seldom addressed resistance in an open and frank manner, and that the problem is always hidden or curtailed.

In organisations (for example a school), according to Terhart (2013), the following questions prevail regarding change:

Why change things? Innovations and change can trigger feelings of insecurity and are regarded as an attack on professional competence and identity.

How will that work? In general, there is great uncertainty where common practices are being replaced by new ones that have not yet been proven. This creates uncertainty and resistance. This is particularly the case if new procedures of work are being envisaged as an intensification of work, or as a restriction of individual autonomy in work, or a combination of all of these experiences. (Terhart, 2013)

The NCCA (2008) suggest that strategies to manage resistance consist of facilitating the movement of individuals and groups through the normal stages of denial, resistance to change, then adaptation, acceptance and commitment. This can only succeed if there is a focus on enabling staff to have the tools and skills required to make the change, and through building in short-term wins for those involved in the change process. Terhart (2013) suggests that teachers will always ask: what is in it for me? How will I personally benefit in and through the change process or do I have to learn new things, work differently and maybe even more, without direct or symbolic gratification?

Moore et al. (2002) suggest that teacher reactions to change, are either to comply, to resist or to be pragmatic in the face of managerial reform pressure. Maier (2009, 2010), however, concluded that it does not make sense to increase accountability pressure on schools because this does not lead to improvement in teaching practices. Terhart (2013, p.497) concludes that, 'if everything has to be and therefore is a success, the question arises as to why we constantly witness the introduction of new reforms?' Ford and Ford (2010, p. 24) opine that 'resistance can be a valuable resource in the accomplishment of change'. They further posit that 'resistance is feedback, and like all feedback, it may be useful for improving the design and implementation of the process in question'; change agents therefore do not need to overcome or eliminate all resistance because some of it is valuable (Ford and Ford, 2010, p. 30). According to Ford and Ford (2010, p. 34), some resistance is valuable for 'apparent resistance can be an important resource in improving the quality and clarity of the objectives and strategies at the heart of a change proposal, and can be used to improve the prospects for successful implementation'. Change agents can benefit from regarding some resistance as 'the legitimate response of engaged and committed people who want a voice in something that is

important to them. It is a sign of engagement, an opening for a dialogue' about change (Ford and Ford, 2010, p. 35).

2.29 School Improvement

Kyriakides et al. (2018) contend that education is a powerful tool for improving a person's life chances. However, Micklewright and Schnepf (2007) contend that school failure has an on-going negative impact on a person's life chances, leading sometimes to a life of on-going struggle to participate in the financial, civic and social aspects of society.

A whole-school improvement approach is justified on the basis that school improvement not only contributes to the quality of educational provision and outcomes for students, but that it also promotes equity for all students in the school. Creemers and Kyriakides (2015, p.105) suggest that 'school improvement projects can have an impact on student learning outcomes only when these projects are based on valid theories'. School effectiveness or school improvement is always connected to student achievement gains (see for example, Antonou and Kyriakides, 2011, 2013; Azigwe et al., 2016; Azkiyah et al., 2014; Christofordou et al., 2014; Kyriakides et al., 2016). The Dynamic Approach to School Improvement (DASI), to which these academic writers generally subscribed, assumed that each school should develop its own strategies and action plans for school improvement. They opined that the strategies and action plans must take into account the complexity of school effectiveness. The DASI model also allows the stakeholders a flexibility to address their improvement priorities in an adjustable way (Sammons, 2009; Creemers and Kyriakides (2010); Heck and Moriyama, 2010; and Hoffman et al., 2010).

The DASI model also supports the conclusion that one should always take into account the abilities of the stakeholders, most particularly teachers, students and senior management. Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) contends that no school improvement can take place without the role of teachers as intellectuals and problem solvers, a role from which their accumulated knowledge is garnered as a major resource in all activities pertaining to school improvement.

According to Creemers and Kyriakides (2015, p.106), 'effective schooling is seen as a dynamic ongoing process'. Therefore, schools must engage in the understanding that school improvement is a continuous journey, with no end process. The DASI model stresses that each school should develop its own strategies and improvement plans subject to the aim of improving teaching and learning with ongoing improvement outcomes for students; nothing else will suffice (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2010). In addition, stakeholders should be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the improvement plan (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2015). By being intimately involved in the process, stakeholders take ownership of the project which also considers their existing skills, experience and abilities.

Teacher collaboration is a key component of school-effectiveness research and school-development processes (Collins, 2002; Muijis, 2015; Scheerens, 2000). Successful schools are always measured by the level of students' academic outcomes, and these outcomes are predominantly believed to be the result of a high level of collaboration and cohesion among teachers (Chapman & Muijis, 2013). Teacher collaboration contributes to many beneficial aspects of both school improvement and school effectiveness (Doppenberg et al., 2012). Beninghof and Leensvaart (2016) conclude that teachers who collectively plan and teach lessons as a subject department develop better teaching strategies and a clearer focus on students than if they did it individually, which leads to improved student achievement. Other

studies on collaboration report positive effects such as improved student understanding, better learning, and increased motivation (Akiba and Liang, 2016; Darra and Kanellopoulou, 2019). Ultimately, good teaching and successful performance of students are seen as markers of high school quality (Vescio et al., 2008). Moreover, according to Forte and Flores (2014) and Kunnari et al. (2018), teacher collaboration can act as a safeguarding shield against burnout or disenchantment at work. Collaboration can assist with emotional well-being and can have positive effects on productivity and resilience.

On the other hand, the lack of collaborative practice has serious consequences for a school. It is a threat to innovation, where teachers work next to each other without interaction or the connection of knowledge (Honingh and Hooge, 2014). It is very difficult for a school with a lack of teacher collaboration to be an effective and a high-quality school (Scheerens, 2000). Lack of collaboration can lead to no common structure being formed vis à vis common teaching plans, common examination papers, common marking schemes and triangulation of examination results which are part of best practice (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Due to the many benefits that collaboration can have on many aspects of school, lack of collaboration in school can be difficult to understand. Findings report that teachers rarely put into practice the intensive form of collaboration that is needed; rather, their collaboration is reduced to an exchange of information or material (Cheng and Ko, 2009; Vangrieken et al., 2015). This might be explained by the autonomy that teachers perceive to be their right (Lortie, 1975), and where teachers want to do their jobs uninterrupted by others (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Collaboration is often seen by teachers as impeding their autonomy to do their own work in the classroom, which is seen by them as part of their job description (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Collaboration needs to be considered within its specific context. In order to collaborate successfully, common goals, willingness of colleagues, openness, and trust are needed within the school, as well as support from the principal and sufficient time resources (Goddard et al., 2007; Scruggs et al., 2007). Without collaboration, ‘a live and let live’ attitude among teachers prevails, resulting in poor educational practices.

2.30 Streaming

Smyth and McCoy (2011, p. 9) give a concise definition of streaming: ‘Streaming involves using performance on a test (or another metric) to allocate students to different classes on the basis of (assessed) ability’. Sukhnandan and Lee (1998, p. 55) highlight that streaming allocations ‘are based on tests and are not value-free and they ignore the variation in pupils’ abilities across subjects’. Those in lower-stream classes are allocated to ordinary level in all subjects, and Smyth (2018, p. 1) highlights the effects of this decision on students:

Early decisions about not pursuing higher level are found to have long-term consequences by closing off particular pathways for the future. These early decisions are often made in the absence of formal school-based guidance, thus contributing to social inequalities in young people’s destinations.

Furthermore, Sukhnandan and Lee (1998, p. 55) emphasise that ‘mobility between streams is rare’. According to Smyth (2018, pp. 3-4),

much of the international research on ability grouping focuses on student outcomes, especially academic achievement. Students in lower streamed classes are found to be exposed to less demanding work and hence achieve lower exam grades, have lower educational aspirations and are more likely to drop out of secondary school than those allocated to higher stream classes.

As regards putting forward a rationale for streaming, Smyth, (2018, pp.8-9) opines that

The main rationale for ability grouping is that it allows teachers to cater for the needs and abilities of students in a more or less homogenous group. However, student reports indicated that streaming did not result in a close match between pace of work and perceived need. Over half (54%) of those in lower stream classes felt that their teachers went too slowly with their class, fuelling boredom and even disengagement.

These are significant consequences which result from the practice of streaming. Teacher expectations play a crucial role in academic achievement. Streaming sets off a vicious cycle, in that ‘curriculum differentiation and resulting labels based on perceived ability contributed to mutually reinforcing low teacher and student expectations in lower stream classes’ (Smyth, 2018, p. 9). Sukhnandan and Lee (1998, p. 55) highlight that placement in a low stream impacts negatively on pupils’ self-esteem, ‘leading to a decrease in their levels of motivation and hence their achievement’.

Smyth (2018, p. 16) describes how there is a greater use of streaming in working-class schools and furthermore notes that this served to increase social inequality in experiences and outcomes within and between schools, while Sukhnandan and Lee (1998, p. 55) found that streaming discriminates against certain groups of students, with boys in particular being over-represented in the low streams. Smyth (2018, p. 17) highlights the impact that being placed in a low stream can have on the future academic achievements of students:

curriculum differentiation at lower secondary level is found to have significant consequences for access to higher level subjects within upper secondary education and thus for performance in the high stakes upper secondary exam.

Byrne and Smyth (2010) revealed that 60% of students in the lowest streams left school early, compared to 7% in the higher streams; furthermore, those in the lower streams are 13 times more likely to drop out than those in mixed-ability classes. Boaler et al. (2000) found in their study that experiences of students who were streamed amounted to disaffection, polarisation and the construction of failure. Maharaj and Zareey (2022) carried out research on streaming and the consequent impact on student relationships; they found that it caused significant social divide amongst students, with those in the lowest streams suffering the most negative consequences. In sum, streaming more often paints a negative picture, based on it being inequitable but also because of a weak link between the practice of streaming and student outcomes (Johnston and Wildy, 2016).

2.31 Student Voice and School Self Evaluation (SSE)

In relation to student voice, the assertion by Fielding (2004, p.309) is most relevant: ‘There are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as (being) genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together’. Cook-Sather (2006) acknowledged that all matters pertaining to learning, teaching and schooling should be part of the remit of students in the form of student voice.

Brown et al. (2021), Skerritt, O’Hara and Brown (2021), and Faddar et al. (2021) argue that Student Voice is heard in schools in Ireland predominantly as a result of School Self Evaluation (SSE). Brown et al. (2020, p. 99) highlight how ‘the introduction of SSE in 2012 to Irish schools provided a legislative and structural mechanism for the enhanced development of student and parent voice in Irish schools’. Brown et al. (2020), further contend that SSE which now includes students and parents’ participation, has moved schools in Ireland up from level 3

on Hart's ladder of participation, which represents tokenistic involvement, to level 5, which represents that both parents and students are consulted, informed and involved. This conveys a change, going from non-participation to participation in the decision-making process in schools. Moreover, Faddar et al. (2021) argue that the lack of resources and expertise in schools regarding the implementation of SSE can negatively impact the inclusion of parent and student voices.

Although the Irish Inspectorate attempts to gather student voice by administering surveys to second- and fifth-year students to evaluate school quality during a whole-school inspection, and although Student Councils are charged with promoting the involvement of students in the affairs of the school (Education Act, 1998, Section 27, 4 (a)), Skerritt et al. (2021) opined that student voice was not commonly used in Irish classrooms. They found only limited examples of teachers seeking feedback on their teaching from their students, or the layout of the classroom or students choosing the texts to be studied.

These comments refer to voluntary secondary schools and community schools, while in ETB schools, these researchers found that 'the discourse of consultation was very strong' (Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara, 2021, p. 14). Therefore, these authors (Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara, 2021, p. 14) posit that their research shows that 'student voice is being used to different extents in different schools in different settings'.

2.32 Context and Student Voice

Skerritt, O'Hara and Brown (2021) maintain that context is crucial when examining the role of student voice in a school. Context refers to many aspects of a school, including the following: school patronage; socio-economic status of students; rural or urban location; age and

experience profile of teachers; single-sex or co-educational school; primary or post-primary school. Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara (2021, p. 2) maintain that student voice 'is likely to be enacted differently in different schools.' They further contend that school patronage and socio-economic context are the two most significant variables in relation to student voice. They posit that religious-run schools, such as Catholic voluntary secondary schools, are less inclusive of student voice than other schools, such as ETB schools, which they perceive to be more democratic; in addition, they argue that 'student voice is in some cases also more pronounced in schools with disadvantaged status' (Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara, 2021, p. 16).

2.33 Management-level Consultation and Classroom-Level Consultation and Student Voice

Skerritt, O'Hara and Brown (2021, p.3) differentiate between management-level consultation and classroom-level consultation in relation to student voice. Examples of the former include questionnaires being issued to students and informal conversations where the principal alone seeks to listen to the student voice on classroom practice without any mediation by teachers. An example of the latter refers to teachers seeking to hear students' views themselves, for instance when teachers carry out surveys in a verbal or written format, sometimes as part of the SSE process and sometimes on a more informal basis to seek feedback on their own teaching. Surveillance of teachers could be one possible outcome of management-level consultations, especially in informal conversations with students, according to Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara (2021, p.15).

2.34 Barriers to the Inclusion of Student Voice

The literature highlights that some teachers fear that increasing student voice may negatively diminish the voice of the teacher; consequently, they exhibit reluctance to foster student voice

inclusion (Faddar et al., 2021; Flutter, 2007; Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara (2021, p. 4) posit that some 'teachers can find student voice threatening'. Brown et al. (2020) argue that student-voice inclusion could be perceived by some teachers as another form of accountability; Faddar et al. (2021, p. 10) posit that this could 'generate feelings of resistance among staff members.'

Brown et al. (2021, pp. 169-170) contend that there are several barriers to student-voice inclusion, namely, parents and students are busy; they lack expertise and capacity to take on such a role. Furthermore, 'students and parents are traditionally isolated from decision-making processes'; therefore, there is a rhetoric/reality gap. Brown et al. (2021, p.171) suggest that the way to overcome these barriers is to recognise that 'parents and students are in fact partners who have a right to full involvement and may bring a lot to the table if invited.'

Faddar et al. (2021) suggest that future research should focus on parent and student voice in SSE by examining how they see their own role. Faddar et al. (2021) maintain that it is essential to provide resources and training at the school level for stakeholders, and that this would in turn facilitate greater and more effective participation by both parents and students. It is significant that Faddar et al. (2021, p. 9) contend that the challenges of including student and parent voice in SSE 'exceed the capacity of an individual school leader to overcome them'.

2.35 Solution to Overcoming Barriers

Skerritt et al. (2022) contend that there is a disconnect between senior leaders and teachers in relation to student voice, with the former group maintaining a strong commitment to student voice and the latter group regarding student voice as marginal. These researchers further contend that a possible solution to this disconnect would be found through 'assigning someone

a specific responsibility for student voice' (Skerritt et al., 2022, p. 618). They posit that this solution has its basis in the literature (Ball et al., 2012; Skerritt et al., 2021).

2.36 School Climate

In answering the question 'where does school culture come from?', Peterson and Deal (2002, p.18) suggest that 'Beneath the surface of everyday life in school is an underground river of feelings, folkways, (behaviours that are learned and shared by a social group), norms, values that influence how people go about their daily work'. These taken-for-granted *modi operandi* affect how people think, feel and act, according to Peterson and Deal (2002). They opine that it influences almost everything that happens in a school. They add that being reflective can help to reinforce cultural patterns that are positive and transform those that are negative or toxic. Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) name some of the elements that combine to produce a positive school climate, namely, student behaviour, student/teacher relationships and student voice. The OECD TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey Report, 2009, p.108) findings in relation to school climate suggest that 'the relevant aspects of the school environment are the physical environment, the social system, relationships between principals, teachers and students, a sense of community, teacher and student morale, norms among peers, and safety'.

According to Smyth and McCoy (2011, p. 8), students need an environment that is conducive to learning in order to progress well; 'effective schools set the conditions which foster teaching and learning within the classroom'. The characteristics of an effective school include, in particular, high teacher expectations, an orderly environment, as well as involved and committed staff, students and parents (Smyth and McCoy, 2011).

The literature shows that supportive teacher-student relationships (Martin and Dowson, 2009; Smyth and McCoy, 2011) are a crucial element of a positive school climate. Martin and Dowson (2009) use the term ‘relational pedagogy’ to describe the impact the relationship between student and teacher has on educational outcomes; this relationship impacts a student’s motivation and hence their academic achievement. Furthermore, Martin and Dowson (2009) posit that these relationships can also impact a student’s self-esteem. Well-being is considered an important aspect of school climate and is prioritised in effective schools, as described in *LAOS* (DES, 2022). According to the OECD (2009, p. 108) report, ‘school climate is fundamental for the quality of schooling and instruction. A growing body of research shows that school climate affects students’ academic achievement and their well-being and personal and social development’.

Kutsyuruba et al. (2015, p. 137) explore all the relationships a student has, namely, with teachers, peers, management and parents. The literature shows that positive student/teacher relationships are far more conducive to learning than negative relationships based on fear (Smyth and McCoy, 2011). Byrne and Smyth (2010) posit that negative student/teacher relationships can even lead to early school leaving.

School climate is reflected in the condition of the plant and this in turn impacts student academic achievement. The literature supports this view: ‘perceptions of physical quality of the school building and conditions of classrooms are important for fostering school climate that is conducive to student learning’ (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015, p. 137). Smyth and McCoy (2011) opine that it is highly significant in terms of school climate that students feel pride in their school. Potter et al. (2002, pp. 250-251) present the elements of their model of A New School Improvement Programme and this includes ‘recognising the importance of improving the

cleanliness of the environment and developing pride and self-esteem'. Conversely, Maxwell (2016, p. 207) argues that 'poor school building condition is also associated with student problem behaviours'. Maxwell (2016, p. 206) therefore posits that 'the quality of a school building may communicate to the students, teachers, and staff that they are valued and that their activities are important'. Furthermore, Maxwell (2016, p. 206) contends that interpersonal relationships are a fundamental aspect of the school climate, and argues that the 'quality of the social and the physical environment are linked to each other and both are linked to student academic outcomes' (Maxwell, 2016, p. 206). The literature shows that teachers (human capital) have the most impact on student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2008); however, the physical environment (physical capital) also has a significant impact on student outcomes. According to Crampton (2009, p. 1) 'investment in human capital is consistently the largest influence on student achievement followed by social and physical capital'.

It is worth noting that the literature reveals that school climate impacts staff as well as students: 'school climate is the result of a variety of factors and actions that affect both students and teachers' (OECD, 2009, p. 40). Research by Guo and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2011) found that school climate could either enhance or minimise the effects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment experienced by teachers. In the OECD (2009, p. 40) report referring to school climate, the following factors were highlighted:

classroom disturbances, student absenteeism and arriving late at school were the three most frequently reported student-related factors that hinder instruction in Australia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Spain and Turkey.

The OECD (2009, p. 108) report found that there are comparatively good teacher-student relations in Austria, Iceland and Ireland; Norwegian teachers report exceptionally good teacher-student relations; on the other hand, the medians for Bulgaria, Italy, Korea, Lithuania, Malaysia and the Slovak Republic are comparatively low. The OECD (2009, p. 109) report conveys that classroom disciplinary climate and time on task rank relatively highly, and teacher-student relations are also described comparatively positively by teachers in Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Iceland and Norway) and Ireland. This OECD (2009, p. 109) report continues:

Classroom climate and thus maintaining order in the classroom require classroom management competencies, structure and authority. Teacher-student relations on the other hand concern the quality of the relationships, which calls for social skills, empathy and mutual respect. Both aspects of the climate within a school are important for effective student learning and development. The Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Iceland and Norway) and Ireland seem best able to prevent disruption and to encourage positive relationships at the same time.

Student behaviour in common areas of the school merit particular attention, as Rusby et al. (2011) report that almost two thirds of aggressive incidents at school occur outside of the classroom in a school common area; such areas include corridors, dining areas, outdoor areas, school entryways, and bus areas. Rusby et al. (2011, p. 401) posit that ‘providing clear expectations, monitoring students’ behaviour, and consistently delivering positive reinforcement for students following expectations can reduce aggressive and disruptive behaviour and increase cooperative behaviour’ in post-primary schools. Further strategies they suggest include establishing school-wide behaviour rules, teaching the rules, and organising supervision in all school areas (Rusby et al., 2011, p. 402).

Rutter et al. (1979) found that ‘cleanliness and tidiness of classrooms were significantly associated with positive student behavior. Conversely, damaged school property (e.g., cracked windows, broken chairs) and graffiti were associated with student violence, student fighting, and low levels of student on-task behavior’ (cited in Rusby et al., 2011, p. 402). Sointu et al. (2017, p. 463) carried out longitudinal research in Finland and found that ‘the results of this study highlight the need for teachers to be aware of how their behaviour influences student outcomes (either positively or negatively) and how positive relationships can function as resiliency factors against school-related difficulties’. Sointu et al. (2017, p. 463) contend that ‘a negative student-teacher relationship may have a long-lasting effect on a student via problematic behaviour, low self-esteem and poor academic performance’, while conversely, ‘a positive student-teacher relationship is strongly associated with positive school outcomes.’

Thapa et al. (2013) contend that there are four different dimensions of school climate, including Safety, Relationships, Teaching and Learning, and Physical Surroundings. Thapa et al. (2013, p. 4) argue that ‘many students do not feel physically and emotionally safe in schools, largely as a result of breakdowns in the interpersonal and contextual variables that define a school’s climate’. As a result, Thapa et al. (2013, p. 4) maintain that such ‘students are more likely to experience violence, peer victimization, and punitive disciplinary actions, often accompanied by high levels of absenteeism and reduced academic achievement’. Gregory et al. (2010), found that students’ safety improved if caring adults were accessible and discipline was consistently enforced; the extent to which rules are consistently and fairly enforced ‘shapes how safe people feel in school’ (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 7).

‘Teaching and Learning represents one of the most important dimensions of school climate’ according to Thapa et al. (2013, p. 9). It is worth noting that ‘the effect of a positive school climate not only contributes to immediate student achievement, but its effect seems to persist for years’ (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 9). It is perhaps fitting to conclude here with these words from Thapa et al. (2013, p. 13): ‘school climate matters’.

2.37 Conclusion

The themes of streaming, school improvement, student voice and school climate set out particularly in the whole school inspection report of 2005 which required immediate attention, mirrored the importance of putting the students front and centre in all decisions pertaining to their schooling. In addition, the concepts of change and resistance to change are intimately connected to each of these themes.

Streaming is a major issue to be addressed in this context. The vast majority of international research, according to Johnston and Wildy (2016), finds streaming to be very disadvantageous for students, academically, socially and psychologically. Streaming is never congruent with the values of quality education. In relation to student voice, although progress has been made in Ireland, it is still a work in progress. At policy level, Ireland has put in place legislative guidelines for the inclusion of student voice in SSE; however, there have been stumbling blocks along the way. Enabling students to have their say also does not mean that their judgements will always be accepted.

School climate is a fundamental aspect of school improvement. It is a critical factor in addressing the achievement gap between students, and in facilitating a positive teaching and learning environment. It is also important in terms of student well-being. School climate is a

broad and multi-dimensional concept; it answers the questions ‘who are we?’, ‘what do we do?’, and ‘why do we do it?’. School improvement enhances student outcomes, which in turn impact a student’s life chances. Collaboration is an essential element of school improvement, which contributes greatly to improved academic outcomes.

The concept of change and its counterpart, resistance to change, cannot be separated from the themes of streaming, school improvement, student voice and school climate. Streaming, school improvement, student voice and school climate all required extensive changes to be made in the school under study in this thesis, and these said changes often gave rise to resistance, which in turn necessitated ways to overcome such resistance.

Section 5 which follows will analyse the three Whole School Evaluation reports carried out in this school in 2005, 2015 and 2018. In proposing recommendations/demands for school improvement, the inspectors in these evaluations saw the urgent need for change, but also provided a roadmap on how to initiate, implement and enact such change.

Section 5: An Analysis of the Inspection Reports Resulting from the Three Whole School Evaluations which Took Place in the School Under Study in the Period 2005-2018

2.37 Introduction

The inspection models that are integral to this study are: Whole School Evaluation (WSE), Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) and Follow Through Inspection (FTI). These inspections were carried out in the school under study from 2005 to 2018. The WSE was carried out in 2005, the WSE-MLL in 2015 and the FTI in 2018. The WSE model was replaced in 2012 by the WSE-MLL. Whole School Evaluation examines the work of the school as an entity, identifying and commending best practice, while also giving recommendations on areas for improvement. This Section 5 is a summation of the actual school inspection reports of 2005, 2015 and 2018 respectively, in the school under study.

2.38 WSE (2005)

The secondary school under study here was notified in Spring 2005 that a Whole School Evaluation would take place. The inspection was conducted in the school over five days. Two inspectors carried out the inspection. The report covered aspects of the management, planning, and organisation of the school, in addition to overall curriculum provision, and support for students. The evaluation of four school subjects, two core subjects and two optional subjects, was also included. Meetings and interviews were held with the board of management, the parents' association, the principal and deputy principal, and a range of teachers and students.

Once the inspection was completed, a report was furnished to the principal by the inspectors, who strongly advised that the report findings be brought to the attention of the relevant

stakeholders, most particularly the board of management. Furthermore, the report made recommendations in relation to the future development of the school.

2.39 Key Findings and Recommendations: WSE (2005)

The inspectors found that there was a strong commitment to the holistic education of the students in the school under study, and that there was an excellent pastoral-care system in the school. It was also noted that the school had the assistance of the trustees who were both enthusiastic and supportive in the running of the school. The board of management was highlighted as having an effective role in the school, as was the Parents' Association, which carried out a range of functions in support of the board and the school staff. The Parents' Association fundraising committee was noted for its constant efforts to fundraise for the school.

The inspectors also found, however, that there were fragmented systems in the school, leading to ineffective structures and outcomes; for example, there seemed to be no follow-through when students breached the discipline code. In addition, student absenteeism was above the national average. There was an on-going problem with the punctuality of the students, as well as issues connected to the wearing of the school uniform. Vandalism was also noted as a particular problem in the school. Overall, the inspectors found that there was an absence of pride in the school, thus recommending that a process of establishing a positive school culture be undertaken by all stakeholders with the aim of regenerating of the school.

The post-of-responsibility structure (posts of responsibility are part of a school's leadership and management structure) was found not to meet the needs of the school. The duties of many post-holders were considered by the inspectors not to meet the needs of the school. A comprehensive review of posts was deemed to be essential in light of the practices in the school

at that time. It was recommended that the tasks and responsibilities of post-holders be allocated in such a way that would facilitate the effective dovetailing of roles, so that school policies would be implemented more cohesively. The inspectors recommended that an immediate review of posts of responsibility be undertaken, as it was hoped that such a review would identify the key needs of the school for the improved operation of the school as a whole.

The inspectors also reported that there was no evidence of a common purpose or of a shared understanding of the role of middle management in the school, stressing that middle management did not meet as a group. This was considered poor practice by the inspectors, especially considering the existing challenges in the context of falling enrolment numbers, and the future viability of the school. Other challenges such as vandalism, non-adherence to the code of behaviour, and the overall lack of pride in the school were highlighted, and the board of management together with senior management were strongly advised to develop a strategic plan for the school and to ensure implementation of that plan. The inspectors recommended that management would draft a mission statement as part of the school plan to articulate their vision for the school. Management was also advised to consult students on relevant policies to capture the student voice, in the hope of an improved level of student engagement, and to ensure the smooth running of the school. In the context of falling enrolment numbers, the inspectors recommended that all stakeholders should have opportunities to discuss and plan, stressing that an immediate and concerted effort would be needed to safeguard and ensure the future viability of the school.

More broadly, it was noted by the inspectors that the school was not in compliance with the Education Act 1998, as there was no school plan in place. They recommended, therefore, that whole-school planning should begin immediately. It was also recommended that a more

inclusive subject choice review take place on a yearly basis, based on the needs of the students. For example, Junior Cycle classes had only one timetabled period for Physical Education (PE). This time allocation was considered insufficient to provide a thorough and balanced curriculum in PE. It was reported that transition year was introduced in 2000, following demand from students and parents. Transition year was optional, and all students were invited to apply for interview. Of the students who applied, only one class group was permitted to participate in the transition-year programme (24 students). The inspectors asked the school to explore the possibilities of encouraging more students to apply for the programme.

In addition, the school reported that it planned to introduce the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme (the Leaving Certificate Applied is a two-year Leaving Certificate, available to students who wish to follow a practical or vocationally oriented programme) in 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 on a trial basis. The school was commended by the inspectors for responding positively to the needs of particular students, and for introducing this programme for two years.

Streaming was in operation in the school under study and was academically driven. Incoming students were channelled prior to entry into higher or ordinary levels based on a predominantly school-based entrance examination. The inspectors noted that some students in the lower class groups across years demonstrated a greater ability than their placement would suggest. During inspection visits to classrooms, the inspectors noted that students were opting for ordinary and foundation-level papers in State examinations, and that this level was not reflective of their higher abilities. It was reported by the inspectors that the practice of streaming was having a negative impact, and alternative models of assigning student levels and class groups needed to be considered.

Timetabling issues also emerged in the course of the inspection. Some core subjects were not scheduled daily, and some classes were taught by two teachers, teaching on different days, and sharing the responsibility of teaching the curriculum to their students. The inspectors recommended that these practices cease in so far as possible. It was also reported that the students were not getting the correct amount of tuition time. The inspectors further recommended that the matter of compliance with the length of the school year should be addressed, and the timetable revised in accordance with Circular Letter M29/95 (DES, 1995).

The inspectors expressed concern that several teachers whose specialism was not mathematics were teaching mathematics. It was suggested that as far as possible, only teachers with appropriate qualifications would be assigned to mathematics classes, most especially at Senior Cycle. The organisation of internal or 'house' examinations which modelled the State examination structures was considered to be good practice; in addition, there was extra support provided for weaker students in some areas, and these structures were commended by the inspectors. The subject plans that were evaluated at the time of the inspection needed particular attention, as they were not considered to be in line with Department of Education policy. It was recommended as per Department of Education policy that subject departments meet on a regular basis. Having completed a review on the broad educational practices in the school, the inspectors moved to the classrooms.

2.40 Recommendations Regarding Teaching and Learning: WSE (2005)

It was recommended that:

- Teachers engage in more formal and proactive collaborative planning in all subject departments, in order to address some of the key issues affecting student work.

- Independent learning skills be fostered among the students in all classes.
- All subjects should promote active learning, an instruction approach that involves actively engaging students with the course materials through discussions, problem-solving, case studies, role plays and other methods to promote more active learning to meet student needs.
- That all class lessons be student-centred rather than teacher-led.
- That all teachers incorporate specific learning objectives such as skills development into the existing planning documentation, which would have the impact of broadening the focus of the planning documents, and would assist in the regular monitoring of student progress.
- That all teachers use a range of questioning strategies during the course of the lesson.
- That all teachers provide feedback for effective learning. A change of practice was recommended to facilitate better student engagement and learning.
- That all teachers correct homework on a very regular basis to assist with student learning.
- That all teachers employ more differentiated classroom methodologies rather than the teacher talking for the duration of the lesson.
- That all subject teachers in their various subject departments would consider the use of differentiated methodologies with colleagues to ensure that their students would be challenged and supported in their learning, and that as a result quality teaching and learning would be prioritised.

At the time of the inspection, the library had been closed for a time. The inspectors strongly recommended that the library be re-opened as a matter of priority, and that the organisation of the library be appraised in the context of the overall post structure in the school. The inspectors

reported that the public-relations officer, who was an assistant principal, actively promoted the school by informing the local media of events taking place in the school. It was recommended by the inspectors that Open Night be reinstated as an important event in the school calendar as it had gradually ceased to take place as school numbers declined. It was further recommended that concerted efforts be made by all stakeholders to publicise the school to increase student enrolment. During the course of the inspection, the board, parents, and staff expressed concerns around the physical condition of the school, indicating that the building looked grim and uninviting. Staff were highly commended by the inspectors for their dedication to providing a range of extra-curricular activities for students.

2.41 Overview: WSE (2005)

The 2005 inspection took place in the school in the Spring of 2005. The WSE Report was finalised in May 2005. When it was made public in the school, the report was deemed to be negative overall, but it was perceived by most staff, on balance, to be a fair evaluation of the school at that time. The overwhelming sense was that things had to change, or the school's future would be uncertain.

The key areas for educational change were firstly, leadership and management and secondly, teaching and learning. In the former, the inspectors recommended improvement in senior and middle-management structures; the formulation of a school plan; the abolition of streaming; a subject-choice review; transition year for all students; the promotion of a collaborative culture in the school; an improvement in school climate; and incorporating student voice. In relation to the latter area, the inspectors recommended the promotion of uninterrupted teaching and learning; the promotion of higher teacher expectations regarding student achievement; the use of diverse methodologies including differentiation and active learning; the prioritisation of

setting regular homework with constructive feedback. The overarching concern of the inspectors was the breakdown in the discipline code, which negatively impacted many of the aforementioned issues.

On the whole, the WSE 2005 report was very detailed, comprehensive and clear. The report provided a very timely set of recommendations, which informed the development of a roadmap for improvement. The report made the recommendations for improvement and the principal was required to implement them with the assistance of staff. Practices had to change, and all organisational and institutional change is challenging. All change takes time and there was a relatively long lead-in time between the initial WSE in 2005 and the WSE-MLL in 2015.

2.42 Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) (2015)

A Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in the school in January and February 2015. There was therefore a ten-year gap before inspectors returned to the school to evaluate the whole school again, perhaps to give the school time to implement and bed down the recommendations of the WSE 2005. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires from students and parents, and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas were inspected.

2.43 Key Findings WSE-MLL (2015)

- The board of management is cognisant of its legislative and statutory obligations and with the support of the trustees, executes its responsibilities in a diligent manner.
- School management places commendable focus on supporting the student learning experience through staff training and support for continuing professional development (CPD).
- The principal provides clear educational leadership, has overseen significant school improvement in recent years and has delivered on extensive and positive change.
- Student-care strategies support the high-quality development and well-being of students, and were co-ordinated effectively and with dedication by teachers.
- The school climate was considered exemplary by the inspector.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good, with exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons.
- Teachers demonstrated a willingness to embrace change and engaged well with curricular initiatives in the school.
- The broad curriculum offered at Junior and Senior Cycle was both balanced and progressive.

2.44 Recommendations for Further Development WSE-MLL (2015)

- The board of management should oversee the development of a cohesive school plan which should contain all ratified school policies, update subject and programme plans, and outline key developmental priorities.
- Senior management, with the over-arching direction of the board of management, should create staff working groups in which each group would focus on a particular priority task within a definite time frame.

2.45 School Inspection Report WSE-MLL (2015)

- The inspectors reported that the board of management was appropriately constituted, that board members were cognisant of legislative and statutory obligations, and that they executed their responsibilities in a diligent manner with the support of the trustees.
- It was further reported that there was an effective finance sub-committee in place, in line with the principles of partnership and collaboration between all stakeholders.
- The board of management promoted and valued the ongoing contribution of staff, parents, and students to all aspects of school life. However, while there was a strategic plan in place for school improvement, the inspectors recommended that the board should oversee the development of a school plan.
- The inspectors reported that the Parents' Association was actively involved in the school and supported ongoing school activities in many ways.
- Responses to the questionnaires from the parents surveyed were very positive overall, particularly regarding the quality of teaching and learning.
- The Parents' Association was actively involved in the life of the school, and parents were consulted on relevant policies. Senior management promoted the meaningful involvement of parents in policy formation which was central to the school ethos.
- It was also reported that student leadership was promoted in the school through the student council, the senior-prefect system, and student mentoring. A representative student council was reported to be actively engaged in school activities.
- Responses from the second-year and fifth-year students who were surveyed at the time of the evaluation revealed that these students had positive attitudes towards learning, teaching, and care strategies in the school.

- A majority of students stated that they were given opportunities to work with other students in class and that they got on well with other students in the school.
- The inspectors reported that school management placed commendable focus on facilitating positive learning experiences through staff training.
- Staff showed a willingness to embrace new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. These approaches were promoted through involvement in instructional leadership, the use of information and communication technology (ICT), and through membership of subject associations.
- The strategic plan for school improvement 2013-2017 was noted by the inspectors, which was part of SSE (School Self Evaluation). This plan highlighted prioritised actions for school development in the following areas: communication; consultation; academic excellence; curriculum planning; and infrastructural developments.
- According to the inspectors, the senior-management team, consisting of the principal and the newly appointed deputy principal, jointly managed the school very effectively and had an active on-the-ground presence in the school.
- The principal was deemed to have provided clear educational leadership, had overseen significant school improvement since the 2005 WSE report, and had delivered on extensive and positive change.
- The principal and deputy principal were deemed to have adopted a partnership approach to school leadership, and to be committed to ongoing school improvement.
- It was also reported that senior-management roles were now clearly defined and were carried out very effectively.
- Almost all parents surveyed during the evaluation agreed or strongly agreed that the school was well run.

- It was reported by the parents that the senior management team promoted leadership for learning and the holistic development of students. This was exemplified in the following areas: the student-mentoring system; the sixth-year improvement plan; improved communication with students regarding change; and increased student involvement in social-awareness programmes.
- It was reported that effective leadership for learning and teaching was based on a commitment to excellence and quality improvement by senior management.
- Staff members were afforded and availed of the opportunity to lead projects.
- Feedback from staff was provided to senior management on a formal individual basis and shared with the staff at staff meetings.

However, the inspectors noted that it was the principal who carried out year-head and guidance duties and it was proposed that, to enable senior management to develop planning into the future, these responsibilities should be delegated to staff. There was no allocation for a further Assistant Principal 1 position funded by the Department of Education at that time. Rather than leave the post of year head vacant, the principal decided to carry out those duties.

- The year heads were deemed to oversee the welfare of their year groups effectively, which included student discipline.
- Year heads were also reported as monitoring and consulting on academic progress, which was deemed very good practice.
- Duties assigned to post-holders and co-ordinators were deemed in the main to meet school needs.
- All post-holders were reported as carrying out their duties effectively.
- Class tutors (volunteers and unpaid) were considered to be a vital support for students, in collaboration with year heads.

- It was reported that academic achievement for sixth years was tracked and monitored effectively, and that target setting and study skills were also among the strategies implemented to increase academic achievement.
- This practice was deemed by the inspectors to be having an identifiable beneficial impact on achievement. The school was also reported to be implementing an efficient and effective tracking-and-monitoring system of student attainment for first-year students.
- It was recommended by the inspectors that this monitoring and tracking be extended to other year groups.

In addition, the 2015 WSE-MLL report stated that in the main, teachers were deployed in accordance with their qualifications and expertise. It was reported that good recruitment practices (in terms of school subjects) had contributed to significant improvements in student learning. It was further noted in the inspection report of WSE-MLL (2015) that teachers demonstrated a willingness to embrace change. Moreover, instructional-leadership practices were deemed to have had a positive impact on levels of staff collaboration and innovative teaching practices, and to have improved the quality of student learning since 2005.

The examination of a random sample of subject plans indicated variation in quality. Some were well-tabulated schemes of work while others were limited to a description of the curriculum content. It was reported that a broad curriculum offered at Junior and Senior Cycle was in the main balanced and progressive. It was deemed praiseworthy that all of the third-year students were actively encouraged to enrol in the transition-year programme and that uptake trends were positive (uptake was in the region of 95%). The duration of the school day was, however, short by seven minutes; it was recommended that this should be addressed. Instruction time for

Physical Education had increased since 2005 but it still fell short of syllabus recommendations for some year groups. It was recommended that this should be addressed as resources permitted (including the employment of a second PE teacher, when such an allocation was permitted).

Twenty-three lessons were observed during the evaluation, comprising all year groups, levels and programmes, and covering core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects. Given the time of year when the Whole School Evaluation took place, revision themes and strategies for the forthcoming school and State examinations inevitably formed the focus of many lessons. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good, with exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons. In a small minority of lessons, there was scope for development with regard to the focus of instruction and in the use of methodologies that support good lesson structure and promote active learning.

It was deemed by the inspectors that guidance counselling and student-care strategies demonstrated high levels of commitment to the care and well-being of students co-ordinated effectively by teachers. It was reported that the learning-support team was a well-organised, qualified and co-ordinated group of teachers who adopted a variety of models of support in line with best practice. The wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities (which included chess, football, rugby, music club, hobbies club, well-being club, debating, Spanish club, French club, Irish club, art club and cookery club) was reported by the inspectors to support the students' holistic educational development. Evening and weekend study, introduced by the principal with the assistance of parents since the 2005/2006 academic year and carried out by parents and the principal on weekdays and weekends, was reported as having greatly enhanced student learning and achievement.

Classrooms and specialist equipment were deemed to be of a high standard. The refurbished library was considered to be an immense asset to the school in supporting student-literacy programmes. A positive, supportive, and affirming learning environment was facilitated overall, and there was a very good rapport between teachers and students. Most lessons were well-planned, well-structured and paced, and teachers shared their learning objectives with the students at the outset. Excellent practice was noted in a small number of lessons where the lesson plan was clearly communicated to the students in terms of proposed learning outcomes, and where these outcomes were revisited at the end of the lesson to assess student learning.

A range of methodologies was observed by the inspectors, and they deemed that most were used to good or very good effect. The excellent practice observed in some lessons was underpinned by elements of instructional leadership, which resulted in improved learning experiences for students, according to the inspectors. In practical lessons, student activity and teacher demonstration were seen as enhancing lesson quality. Innovative and effective use of ICT engaged students in their learning. Good attention to differentiation (supporting students with differing levels of support and challenge based on ability) was noted in a number of lessons, thereby ensuring appropriate levels of challenge for students.

Students worked well together and were supported in many instances by the teachers who circulated, offering guidance to groups when needed. Oral feedback for students in some lessons consolidated and improved student learning and confidence. In the language classes observed, there was consistent use of the target language by the teachers. There were also very good efforts by students to respond in the language of the lesson.

It was reported by the inspectors that there was very good classroom management and students' behaviour was exemplary throughout the inspection. Students were observed to be receptive to learning and applied themselves to the tasks assigned. In some instances, the move from the traditional classroom layout to grouped tables facilitated ease of movement when engaging in student-based activities. Such changes were recommended for all classrooms where a revised seating plan was physically possible (some classrooms were too small for such a seating plan).

Homework was assigned in all lessons observed. Many of the copybooks examined had evidence of corrections and the inclusion of affirmative comments. It was recommended that this good practice be extended to include more formative written feedback indicating to students their strengths and areas for development. There were also some copybooks where there was limited evidence of teacher corrections. The report recommended that a whole-school approach to the practice of providing formative developmental comment on significant homework and assignments should be implemented, to ensure that students' efforts were both validated and progressed.

Good progress was evident in the effective implementation of recommendations made in previous subject-inspection and programme-evaluation reports since 2005. The school was considered to have developed its range of assessment strategies across subject areas. Overall, it was considered by the inspectors that teachers had attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject-inspection reports. Inspectors observed improved practice regarding assessment. There was also significant improvement regarding the integrated use of resources, the range of teaching-and-learning strategies observed and the quality of student activity, student engagement, and levels of challenge during lessons.

According to the inspectors, school management and staff demonstrated both commitment and capacity to bring about improvement through School Self Evaluation. A culture of review and self-evaluation had, they noted, established itself in many aspects of school operation through the administration of surveys, student tracking and student mentoring. School management were advised to progress School Self Evaluation systematically, and to continue with the journey of improving quality at all school levels.

2.46 Overview of the Whole-School Management, Leadership and Learning Report (WSE-MLL) 2015

The WSE 2005 report was very useful in that it provided a detailed roadmap for implementation and enactment, and provided the school with very comprehensive recommendations, which needed to be put in place urgently for the survival of the school. The pertinent changes were taken on board, and it is clear that the WSE (2005) report provided the degree of clarity that the school needed for change. The recommendation in the WSE (2005) report for a team approach to planning and improvement was implemented, and this led to much improved collaboration and consultation in the change/school improvement process.

The WSE-MLL (2015) report affirms the strong educational leadership of the principal in the school. As part of the school context, it is pertinent to point out that teachers in the school under study, in line with all teachers in Ireland, endured a large number of reductions in pay and conditions from 2009 (the time of the economic ‘crash’). Morale was consequently low, in terms of teachers’ sense of professional value in the school under study (as in all other schools in Ireland). The unions advised members not to give any additional time to any additional unpaid duties.

The WSE-MLL (2015) report discussed in this chapter displays a better focus on teaching and learning as a core focal point in school improvement than was noted in the 2005 WSE report. While the 2005 report included teaching and learning in its report, it was only in relation to four subjects. The 2015 WSE-MLL template is more wide-reaching and therefore more effective. This is now the preferred approach of the Inspectorate, as the WSE-MLL report model places teaching and learning at the heart of the school and considers it a whole-school issue.

2.47 Follow Through Inspection (FTI) 2018

In 2018, a Follow Through Inspection was carried out in the school under study. The FTI format is the same for every school. The findings and recommendations of the Follow Through Inspection (2018) are outlined here, together with an analysis of those findings and recommendations. The chapter concludes with an overall analysis of all three inspections carried out in this school between 2005 and 2018.

The format of the Follow Through Inspection (FTI) for all schools is that the recommendations pertaining to the previous report (in the case of the school under study, the WSE-MLL (2015)) are outlined and the degree of progress is noted: i.e., very good progress, good progress, partial progress, no progress.

2.48 Key Findings: Follow Through Inspection (FTI) 2018

The summary of findings in the Follow Through Inspection (FTI) 2018 report was as follows: That all major school policies have been updated and ratified by the board. The report stated that there was a clear focus on academic excellence, pastoral care, listening to the student voice,

and acknowledging parents as stakeholders. It further noted that there is a strong commitment by all teachers and school management to the whole-school professional-planning teams. The school was found to be successfully promoting valuable in-school professional development through teacher collective and collaborative practice.

The FTI (2018) report found that significant school policies in relation to ethos, instructional leadership, well-being, numeracy, literacy, special educational needs (SEN), whole-school planning and assessment had been updated and ratified by the board of management.

The FTI (2018) report further stated that the school has been successful in promoting continuous professional development through teacher collective and collaborative practice. There was evidence that the principal was committed to promoting and providing CPD to all staff. There was also evidence of collaborative practice throughout the school, which had resulted in more evidence of school improvement. The Instructional Leadership programme by Barrie Bennett (a CPD initiative in the school), based on best-practice pedagogy with an aim to maximise student learning, was deemed to provide an excellent scaffold for improvement in the school. The FTI (2018) identified a clear focus on academic excellence, as evidenced in the very significant improvement in State examination results since 2015. Furthermore, there was evidence provided that pastoral care, and listening to student voice (via Student Council and student surveys) had greatly improved the school climate. The school climate was considered exemplary by the inspector.

2.49 Recommendations: Follow-Through Inspection (FTI) 2018

The school was encouraged to finalise the School Self Evaluation (SSE) report of 2013-2017 and the School Improvement Plan (SIP), and to integrate the various elements of the school

plan. The 2018 FTI was very useful as a guide to progress on implementing and enacting recommendations from previous reports. It is noted by the school under study that the issue of integrating and completing the school plan is an ongoing activity. For the first time, the FTI rated the school on progress, with a *Good* rating for progress by the board of management in developing a cohesive school plan, and *Very Good* for senior management in creating focused staff working groups. This is a very useful approach, as it affirms school actions around recommendations and provides clear direction for future improvement.

2.50 Conclusion: Follow Through Inspection (FTI) 2018

The FTI inspection was affirming for the school on its journey of educational change, as according to the inspector, many positive changes were identified, namely, an improved school climate; much improved academic achievement, as revealed in much higher progression rates to Higher Education; distributed leadership in the form of very active SSE teams; student voice being in evidence; evidence of extensive continuous professional development in teaching practices; a committed senior management team who foster educational change.

2.51 Overview of All Three Inspection Reports

The WSE 2005 report was really useful in that it provided the school with a specific roadmap for improvement/educational change. The recommendations of the report came after a very comprehensive evaluation of the school by the inspectors, and the recommendations were deemed by the principal and the majority of staff to be robust but fair and accurate. The 2005 WSE report provided a comprehensive checklist for change/improvement in the school, without which it is doubtful that the school would have remained open. The detail of the evaluation, although stark, provided an objective insight; this kind of detail was particularly advantageous because of the need of the school to improve in order to survive. The staff were

more receptive to the required change, because these recommendations came directly from the Inspectorate. Thus, in effect, the principal was not the author of the recommendations, merely the implementor. The template for evaluation has evolved since 2005, but it might be argued that this type of an evaluation (WSE 2005) may well be appropriate when a school is failing or in decline.

The WSE-MLL (2015) report is more condensed and provides a reasonable link to previous reports, including the WSE (2005) report. Thus, the WSE-MLL (2015) report provides a few clear, well-linked and cohesive recommendations that seek to affirm the school on its journey to improvement. The FTI (2018) report is welcome, timely and useful, as it provides the school with affirming comment, judgement, and direction for ongoing improvement. The FTI (2018) report showcases how inspection can work well when it is collaborative rather than top-down (i.e. the Inspectorate leading change without the active participation of the members of the school). A dialogue took place between the inspector and senior school management in FTI (2018). Thus, the essence of inspection as a collaborative approach to school improvement is visible in this report. This is a welcome development.

The next opportunity for future inspections will be to ensure true collaboration between SSE and external evaluation, according to the Inspectorate (LAOS, 2022; SSE, 2022). In this scenario, the school becomes the driving force for school improvement, with the Inspectorate engaging in a collegial conversation that affirms and guides the school on its ongoing journey of improvement (LAOS, 2022; SSE, 2022).

In conclusion, it is clear that the Inspectorate, since the inception of WSE, has taken a strategic approach to external evaluation. The WSE model has evolved over time, so that the system

now integrates both WSE-MLL and FTI. This suite of inspection activities gives schools an opportunity to reflect on areas for development over time and plan for actions for improvement. It is clear from the analysis of reports on the school under study that since the WSE (2005), the school has come a very long way, with a road still to travel. The FTI (2018) acts as a signpost on the school's journey to significant improvement. In this context, inspection activity is a valuable aid to school improvement, but of little value without the school being committed, proactive, and focussed on its goals. These are informed by inspection reports and more importantly guided by the SSE and SIP, both of which are, by definition, evolving documents.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Section 1

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted in this study. It begins with a discussion of worldviews and research paradigms and my stance as a pragmatic researcher, providing an account of the underlying theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework that guided the choice of methodology. In addition, I discuss the reasons for choosing a case-study approach and the reasons for choosing a mixed-methods approach for this study. I give a detailed account of the research design. The research aims are stated, and the data-gathering process, analysis, and validation, are explained. The chapter concludes with an important discussion of the ethical considerations, given that I was an insider researcher. In conclusion, the limitations in conducting this study are discussed.

3.2 The Research Question

This case study explores whether implementing and enacting the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills Whole School Evaluation (WSE) report of 2005; implementing and enacting the recommendations of the Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) of 2015; and implementing and enacting the recommendations of the Follow-Through Inspection report (FTI) of 2018 provided a roadmap for school improvement/educational change in a rural secondary school in Ireland.

The main question is broken down into further sub-questions:

1. Whether the implementation of the inspection reports and recommendations helped to improve teaching and learning in the school?

2. Whether the implementation of the inspection reports and recommendations helped to improve the senior leadership/in-school management strategy in the school?
3. Whether the implementation of the inspection reports and recommendations helped to improve school climate?
4. Whether the implementation of the inspection reports and recommendations caused students, parents, teachers and members of senior management to see a positive change in the school, in terms of being a better performing school?
5. Whether the implementation of the inspection reports and recommendations helped to improve student behaviour in the school?
6. Whether the implementation of the inspection reports and recommendations helped to improve academic achievement in the school?
7. Whether the implementation of the inspection reports and recommendations helped to improve the running of the school?

3.3 Worldviews and Research Paradigm – An Overview

Guba (1990, p.17) describes the term worldview as ‘a basic set of beliefs that guide action’. Other scholars have called them ‘paradigms’ (Mertens, 2010) or ‘epistemologies and ontologies’ (Crotty, 1998). Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.5) see worldviews ‘as a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study’. They suggest that researchers progress worldviews/paradigms/epistemologies and ontologies based on their research-discipline orientations, their mentors, their research communities and their past experiences as researchers. Creswell and Creswell (2018) believe that the types of beliefs held by individual researchers will strongly influence their chosen research methodologies. Based on their own worldview, researchers will choose quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approach.

Slife et al. (1995) suggest that although philosophical stances are largely hidden in research, they do influence the practice of research and therefore there is a need for the researcher to identify his/her particular philosophical stance at the outset of the study. Grogan and Simons (2012, p.29) concur and suggest that all research has a philosophical basis or paradigm; ‘researchers carry certain philosophical assumptions about the world into their research even if assumptions are not acknowledged or made explicit’. This was true in my case. In ontological terms, according to Cohen et al. (2018), quantitative methods may have their roots in positivism, post-positivism, and the scientific paradigm. Quantitative researchers consider truth as an objective reality in that only one truth exists. Cuff and Payne (1979, p.4) define the scientific view as involving ‘standards and procedures for demonstrating the “empirical warrant” of its findings, showing the match or fit between its statements and what is happening or has happened in the world’. The most distinctive feature of the scientific view, according to Cohen et al. (2018), is its empirical nature. Next is its set of procedures, which not only show how the findings have been arrived at but are clear so that fellow scientific researchers can repeat them in further studies. Quantitative data, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), provide a general understanding of a problem. The quantitative approach was therefore chosen as one of the two approaches for this study.

In ontological terms, qualitative researchers, according to Creswell and Creswell (2017), have their roots in the interpretive worldview. Interpretivists see reality as being created and constantly changing as people’s life experiences evolve over time. Qualitative data provide a more detailed understanding of a problem. The interpretative view, while sharing the rigour of the scientific approach, emphasises how people differ from one another (Cohen et al., 2018).

It maintains that the world exists, but that different people interpret it in different ways and this view favours the qualitative approach.

For Cohen et al. (2018, p.8), ‘educational research has absorbed competing views of the social sciences, - the scientific view and an interpretative view’. Mixed-methods researchers bring to their inquiry a worldview composed of beliefs and assumptions about knowledge that informs their study. This researcher has done likewise. In terms of the epistemology of quantitative research, the researcher and the researched are independent entities. The researcher is studying a phenomenon objectively without influencing or being influenced by it, and thus objective truth is uncovered (Sale et al., 2002). In terms of the epistemology of qualitative research, ‘researchers focus on subjective accounts, views and interpretations of a phenomenon by the participants (including the researcher): their “definition of the situation” which is typically reported verbally rather than numerically’.

Combining quantitative research methodology and qualitative research methodology can provide varying pictures or perspectives to answer the research question in a more comprehensive way. According to Cohen et al. (2018), Mixed Methods Research (MMR) mixes data but also mixes paradigms, ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies, in order to give a fairer, more rounded picture of the phenomenon under investigation. In a mixed-methods approach, methodological pluralism is considered an optimum approach as it enables errors in a single-method approach to be identified and corrected (Johnson et al., 2007).

3.4 The Rationale for Choosing Pragmatism

In terms of worldviews and paradigms, I identify with pragmatism. A pragmatic worldview, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), is not associated with any one system of philosophy

or reality. Researchers who choose a pragmatic worldview are free to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures that best suit their purpose. Ontologically, I believe that there are multiple realities and in terms of my epistemological beliefs, I believe that knowledge is generated based on individual experiences. In terms of my own ontological and epistemological stance, pragmatism was chosen as it is my view that there is value in collecting quantitative data as well as qualitative data to solve this research question. Pragmatism draws on numerous ideas, including what works, using diverse approaches and valuing both objective and subjective knowledge, as well as different types of data collection and analysis, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). The pragmatic approach was adopted by me for this study as it was the most practical and effective way of answering the research question.

The use of quantitative methods and qualitative methods was therefore relevant to ascertain in the most comprehensive manner whether recommendations from whole-school inspections, when implemented by the principal, provided a roadmap for school improvement in this particular school. Pragmatism was seen by me to be the way of investigating the research problem that most focuses on practical solutions. Yin (2013), Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009) all agree that when multiple sources of data and methods are used, a case-study approach is justified as it allows the researcher to obtain insight on an issue.

3.5 Case Study Approach: Overview

Cohen et al. (2018, p.226) caution all researchers that ‘every element of the research should not be arbitrary but planned and deliberate, and the criterion of planning must be fit for purpose’. I undertook to do this during the course of this study. After careful consideration, I decided on a case study. Bassey (1999, p.5) defines an educational case study ‘as critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve

educational action'. Adelman et al. (1980) define a case study as the study of an instance in action, a unique example of real people in real situations. In addition, they contend that case studies can access situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. These definitions are applicable to this study, as the outcomes of this study will inform educational judgements and decisions in order to improve knowledge.

According to Yin (2009), the case study commonly explores, describes or explains the case of interest and enables holistic and meaningful context-constituted knowledge and understanding about real-life events. Yin (2009) also suggests that the boundary line between the phenomenon and its context is fuzzy or indistinct; therefore, a case study is a study of a case in a context, and it is important to put the case in its context, as I do here. A case study provides a unique example, according to Cohen et al. (2007), allowing the researcher to depict, analyse, and interpret the singularity of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts. I present the views of such real people in this study. Yin (2009, pp.72-73) further suggests that case studies can 'enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together'. Yin (2018, p.5) adds that a case study allows the researcher to focus in-depth on a 'case' and 'to retain a holistic and real-world perspective'. Bassey (1999) opines that one of the main benefits of educational case-study research is being where the action is; taking testimony from and observing the actors first hand is extremely beneficial. I had the privilege of being in that position, as principal of the school.

Schramm (1971) maintains that the essence of a case study is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result. This is the kernel of this study; the recommendations of all of the inspectors' reports (WSE, 2005; WSE-MLL, 2015; FTI, 2018) were implemented by me as principal of the school, and

the recommendations were implemented because they provided me with a roadmap for school improvement/educational change. The implementation journey is described and the results are outlined in this study. For all of the above reasons, a case-study approach was considered by me to be the best approach in order to answer the research question.

3.6 Research Design

Yin (2018, p.26) opines that every empirical research study has a research design. The design ‘is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and ultimately, to its conclusions’. A research design is imperative in keeping the study focused on the research question(s), establishing what data is relevant to the case, what particular data to collect, and how to analyse the results. According to Yin (2018), in case-study research, five components of a research design are especially important:

- A case study’s questions;
- Its propositions, if any;
- Its case(s);
- The logic linking the data to the propositions; and
- The criteria for interpreting the findings.

Yin (2018, p.18) cautions the researcher who adopts a case-study approach also to adopt a rigorous approach. He suggests that ‘too many times, a case study researcher has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has allowed equivocal evidence to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions’. In adhering to Yin’s advice, I was particularly mindful to adopt a rigorous approach; this meant following procedures to make sure that no ambiguous data made its way into the findings and conclusions of this study.

3.7 The Rationale for Selecting a Single Case-Study Approach in this Research

According to Stake (1995), the ultimate aim of a researcher in a single case study is that the reader can understand the findings so well that they can implement the study in their own situation. This for me was the most important aim of this study. In agreement with Stake (1995), Nisbit and Watt (1984, p.72) opined that a single case study should be understood as a ‘specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle’. A single case can represent the critical test of significant theory, as this case does. This thesis asks: did the recommendations of Whole School Evaluations, when implemented and enacted by the principal, provide a framework/roadmap for improvement/educational change in this particular school? This single case study is significant as it provides data on whether stakeholders in the school agreed or disagreed that the recommendations of Whole School Evaluations implemented by the principal in 2005, 2015 and 2018 provided a roadmap for school improvement. The question is whether the recommendations of the inspection reports offered the school a potential roadmap or tool for school improvement. In implementing the recommendations, the principal choose to accept the changes demanded and accept that the recommendations provided a catalyst for change. The recommendations of the whole-school inspection reports gave the school the agency to change. The focus of this study is therefore on the Inspectorate and the power of its recommendations to improve a school if the recommendations are implemented by the principal. A single case study can generally allow others to understand the findings and implement the study in their own situation, if applicable.

3.8 Insider Researcher

Before undertaking this study, I gave much consideration to the concept of ‘insider researcher’ because of my position as principal of the school. I came to the conclusion that to abandon this study for another one would be a missed opportunity. As the findings and recommendations of

the Whole School Evaluations were not mine, I chose to implement the recommendations of the WSE report (2005) after some initial months of observation, when I observed the evidence of serious areas of concern, which had rightly been identified by the inspectors.

I continued with that practice of implementing and enacting all recommendations of all Whole School Evaluations (2015, 2018). I viewed myself as the conduit for change, an implementer and an enactor. Indeed, on reading Miller (2002), who argued that ‘insiders’ can be productive leaders of change in schools where they are viewed with trust and credibility, by the various staffroom sub-cultures, I questioned whether this was an accurate description of my relationship with all staff in the school. Leaders of change, according to Miller (2002), must have an ‘outward focus’ in addition to their connectedness with the culture. This resonated with me. He also makes a true and insightful remark that leaders need to grasp the motivations of those whom they are leading (teachers). According to Miller (2002), the primary motivations of professional teachers are moral and intrinsic, rather than extrinsic. I strongly agree with this observation. He suggests that those managing change processes need to realise that the quality of the teachers’ relationship with the individual introducing the change could be a significant determinant of successful implementation. This observation by Miller (2002) was very apt. He also cautioned that the reliability of data and analysis were of particular concern in the research design. This recommendation was taken on board by me and therefore a mixed-methods case study was undertaken as the best approach. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) made a pertinent comment that using multiple paradigms contributes to greater understanding of the research question.

Words of caution by Shaughnessy et al. (2003) resonated with me in that the researcher might be participant and observer and may over or understate the case (verification bias). To limit

bias in the data, Denzin (2007) suggested that multiple research methods be used. He argued that besides methodological triangulation as a means of limiting bias in the data, other forms of triangulation should be considered by the researcher such as data triangulation, investigator triangulation and theory triangulation. I decided to follow his advice in this study, as noted below.

3.9 Triangulation in This Study

Olsen (2004) defines triangulation as the mixing of methods so that diverse viewpoints cast light on the topic. This definition is applicable to this study as more than one approach, namely, qualitative and quantitative research methods, was used to answer the research question. Several different types of triangulation are described here: (a) theory triangulation, (b) method triangulation, (c) data source triangulation, (d) investigator triangulation, (e) time triangulation, (f) space triangulation.

A. Theory Triangulation

Existent theories of change were examined in relation to the data, especially educational change (Fullan et al., 2005). My bond with certain participants in this study, namely, present students and past pupils, allowed them to speak to me in ways in which an outsider may not have accomplished. Perryman (2011) suggests that it is quite useful to know the unique history, the alliances, the micro-politics of the school, in that it allows the researcher to go beyond taking comments at face value. This was applicable in my case.

B. Methodological Triangulation

1. Surveys
2. Interviews

3. Document Analysis
4. Fieldnotes

C. Data Triangulation – Persons

1. Questionnaires administered to all students, parents and teachers in the school
2. Interviews: the following stakeholders participated in the interviews: current students, current teachers, current parents, past pupils and the deputy principal. Interviews were also conducted with two former inspectors who had no professional association with the school. The interviews took place from 2nd June to 30th June 2021.

D. Investigator Triangulation

The observations of a trusted colleague outside of the school were used to collaborate sections of the fieldwork.

E. Time Triangulation

1. Fieldnotes
2. Questionnaires Date
3. Interviews Dates

F. Space Triangulation

Questionnaires for current students (pencil and paper) were administered in the hall in the school in small groups (due to Covid restrictions) on 3rd May 2021. Questionnaires for staff and parents were sent by Google forms again on 10th May 2021 as Google forms were considered the most appropriate methods of collecting that data.

3.10 Strengths and Weaknesses of Case-Study Approach

Nisbet and Watt (1984) suggest strengths and weaknesses of the case-study approach.

Strengths:

- the results are more easily understood by a wide audience because they are generally written in everyday language; it can catch features that may be lost in a quantitative-only approach.
- is strong on reality; can be undertaken by a single researcher; may provide insights into other situations, thereby assisting in the interpretation of similar situations, and interpretations may lead to policy development or institutional development.

Weaknesses:

The weaknesses, according to Nisbet and Watt (1984), are:

- that the results may not be subject to generalisation, except where readers can see their application;
- case studies may not be easily susceptible to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective;
- they may be vulnerable to problems of observer bias.

I tried to avoid observer bias as much as possible. This aspect will be discussed in a later section. As with many studies, this current study's design is also subject to limitations. I will divulge any limitations that arose in the Discussion Chapter.

3.11 The Rationale for Choosing a Mixed Methods Design Technique for this Study (Two-Phase Design)

The rationale for choosing a mixed-methods approach for this study was to combine the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches so as to provide robust research. According to Yin (2018), mixed-methods research can enable the researcher to address broader or more complicated research questions than case studies alone. It is for this reason that I chose a mixed-methods approach, as Yin (2018) argues that this approach is very appropriate for a complicated study. According to Green (2007, pp.20-21), the primary focus of a study conducted with a mixed-methods way of thinking ‘is to better understand the complexity of the social phenomena being studied’. She adds that it seeks to do what she calls ‘unsettling the settled’. This seemed a good description of the aims of this study.

Greene et al. (1989) give five rationales for a mixed-methods approach: triangulation; complementarity; development; initiation; and expansion, all of which they assert add credibility to findings and increase confidence/validity about inferences drawn from the data.

I am using mixed methods because:

- (a) it helps me to triangulate my data;
- (b) the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches improves my study;
- (c) it helps me ensure that I get breadth and depth of knowledge in answering my research question;
- (d) it also allows me to be admitted to a greater number of participants to answer my research question;
- (e) using mixed methods will expand the data giving increased confidence in the validity of my findings.

According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p.15), ‘Many researchers need to complement one method with another, and all researchers need a solid understanding of multiple methods used by other scholars to facilitate communication, to promote collaboration, and to provide superior research’. Mixed-methods researchers (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018; and Greene, 2007) believe that as long as the assumptions of both paradigms are respected and the approaches are combined to complement one another, then mixing research assumptions, methods and approaches helps to improve the overall quality of the research. Mixed methods are ‘the multiple ways of seeing and hearing’ (Greene, 2007, p.20). In this study therefore data was collected from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study sequentially, as the explanatory sequential design was considered to be the most appropriate approach.

3.12 Description of the Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p.77), the primary intent of the use of the explanatory sequential design ‘is to use a qualitative strand to explain initial quantitative results’. This approach was adopted by me in this study. Surveys were conducted firstly, followed by interviews.

A. Surveys

The quantitative data was collected from the students, the parents, and the teaching staff in the school. These stakeholders were deemed most appropriate as they were well-placed to give their views on whether this school had improved or not as a result of the implementation and enactment of the recommendations of the whole-school inspection reports by the principal. I had considered administering surveys to past pupils as it would have afforded me the

opportunity of further comparison, but this was not logistically possible during Covid restrictions.

The findings from the quantitative data were used to inform the follow-up qualitative data collection. Some of the participants from the quantitative phase participated in the follow-up qualitative data collection – namely, students, parents and teachers. In addition, past pupils, ancillary staff, a member of the senior management team and former inspectors participated in the qualitative data collection. Again, these participants were chosen as they were considered by me to be well positioned to give their own accounts as to whether the school had improved or not as a result of the implementation and enactment by the principal of the inspectors’ recommendations.

In this research design, the quantitative and qualitative data collections are related to one another and are not independent. It was therefore important to me that equal care and attention was placed on both the quantitative and qualitative data collections. I collected the quantitative data in the first phase, analysed the results and then used the results to plan the second phase, the qualitative phase. The quantitative results informed the types of participants to be interviewed for the second phase, and the types of questions to be asked to help explain confusing, unusual or contradictory survey responses. In sum, the qualitative data helped to explain the initial quantitative results in more detail.

The data-collection decisions for the explanatory sequential design concentrated on my making a strong connection between the two phases, and included deciding whether to use the same or different participants for the second phase, giving particular consideration to the sample size to use for both strands, the results that needed to be further explained, and how follow-up

participants should be selected. The sample size for the quantitative phase was 944 participants. The sample size for the qualitative phase consisted of 19 participants. The student survey was completed using pencil and paper in the school on Wednesday 3rd May 2021. Due to Covid restrictions, it was not possible to use the computer room for class groups, therefore appropriate numbers (according to the Covid protocol) completed the survey in the school hall. In relation to completed surveys, the number of student participants was 578; parents numbered 335 and teachers 31. The parents' and teachers' surveys were carried out using Google forms on 10th May 2021, as it was more appropriate to conduct these surveys online. The total survey population and the actual response rates are outlined in the table below.

Survey Population and the Actual Surveys Response Rates			
Survey Participants	Entire Population	Total Completed Surveys	Surveys Response Rate
Students	671	578	86.1%
Teachers	37	31	83.7%
Parents	401	335	83.5%

The survey participants included the entire student population of 671 students, of whom 578 completed the student survey, yielding a response rate of 86.1%. It should be noted that four class groups were out on a trip on the day that the survey was completed. The surveys were completed on one day in the school under the supervision of the researcher (the school principal). The survey participants included all full-time teachers, namely 37 teachers, of whom 31 completed the teacher survey, yielding a response rate of 83.7%. It should be noted that the teacher survey was an online survey using Google forms.

The survey participants included a total of 401 parents, of whom 335 completed the parent survey, yielding a response rate of 83.5%. All households of students in the school (401) were

sent the online survey to complete, with the request that one parent per household would complete the survey. It should be noted that the parent survey was an online survey using Google forms.

B. Interviews

Yin (2018) reminds researchers that interviews are an essential source of case-study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or actions, a description which is pertinent to this study. This was my reasoning for conducting interviews in this study. The interviewees were selected as they were an essential source employed during this case study to answer the research question. Past pupils were selected because they were students of the old (prior to 1st September 2005) and new (post 1st September 2005) regimes. Current students represented the new regime (senior students in 2020/2021). Parents represented the new regime. One teacher was part of the old and new regime, one teacher was a student of both the old and new regime, and one teacher was part of the new regime only. Two of the ancillary staff were present for both the new and old regimes. One member of the ancillary staff was a past pupil and past parent. All interviewees were selected because of their in-depth knowledge of the school. The former inspectors were chosen because of their work as school inspectors with the Irish Inspectorate.

The interview, according to Hochschild (2009), can do what surveys cannot; that is, they can explore issues in depth, to see how and why interviewees frame their ideas in the ways that they do, and how and why they make connections between ideas, events, values, opinions, and behaviours. Thus, the interview, according to Cohen et al. (2018, p. 507), 'is a constructed and usually planned event rather than a naturally occurring situation'. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study, which were planned in advance. The questions were piloted in advance

of the interviews, with teacher friends and students who had no association with the school. Following feedback, some modifications were made to some of the questions posed. The interviews subsequently were carried out from Wednesday 2nd June up to and including Wednesday 30th June 2021.

Section 2

3.13 Sampling Process – Purposive Sampling

This study sought to find out whether the recommendations following Whole School Evaluations carried out by the Inspectorate implemented and enacted by the principal provided a roadmap for improvement/educational change in a particular school in rural Ireland. The intentional selection of stakeholders in this school was identified by me to develop an understanding of the research question; thus, purposive sampling was undertaken in this study. According to Cohen et al. (2018, p.218), in purposive sampling, researchers hand pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their ‘judgement of their typicality or possession of characteristic(s) being sought’. Teddlie and Yu (2007) agree; they opine that purposive sampling is undertaken in research to achieve representativeness, and to enable comparisons to be made; it provides greater depth to the study but less breath.

My priority in using purposive sampling was to acquire rich in-depth information from those who were in a position to give it. Typical case sampling was used in this study; the purposive sampling included the most typical cases of the group or population under study to attain representativeness. The following participants were selected for the quantitative process of this study: the students in the school (as of May 2021, first years to sixth years), the parents in the school (as of May 2021), the full-time teachers in the school (as of May 2021). The following

participants were selected for the qualitative approach: two former inspectors, present students of the school, parents, past pupils, teachers and ancillary staff.

Quantitative Participants (Surveys)

Students	Parents	Teachers
578	335	31

Qualitative Participants (Interviews)

Past-Pupils	Deputy Principal	Teaching Staff	Parents	Ancillary Staff	Former Inspectors	Current Students
4	1	3	2	3	2	4

Purposive sampling is sometimes characterised as a ‘judgement sample’, as participants are selected to participate in the study based on the professional judgement of the researcher. In this study, there is no intended bias in the choice of purposive sampling. The participants were solely chosen because of their own views and experiences of the school (excluding the two inspectors), and because their views and experiences were pertinent to the aims of this study. Cohen et al. (2018, p.226) caution all researchers that ‘every element of the research should not be arbitrary but planned and deliberate’, and the criterion of planning must be ‘fit for purpose’. I was mindful of this advice during the course of this study.

3.14 Access to Participants

I had access to the participants due to the fact that I was principal of the school that is the subject of this research. It should be noted that the two former inspectors were known to the

researcher on a professional basis, but they were never involved in inspecting the school under study.

3.15 Piloting the Survey

In a pilot, according to Briggs et al. (2012), a group similar to the main population completes the researcher's survey and provides feedback so that the researcher knows that the survey is suitably designed for participant clarity and feedback. I conducted a pilot survey for all three quantitative surveys. The participants in the pilot surveys were in no way connected to the school. They made some useful observations and recommendation on the wording of some of the questions and the questionnaire was adapted accordingly. I gave the pilot surveys equal importance to the actual surveys as I considered them of equal value. As Youngman (1994, p.248) cautions, 'the initial stages of the survey are not independent; the questionnaire structure must include all the facilities deemed necessary for successful analysis'.

3.16 Piloting the Interview

A pilot interview enables the interviewer 'to explore language, the clarity of the questions, and aspects of active listening' (McGrath et al., 2019, p.1003). It ascertains whether the questions were easily understood and ensures that relevant themes emerge connected to the research question (Rowley, 2012, p. 265). Following the pilot interviews, which were conducted with teacher colleagues, parents and teenagers of school-going age outside of the school, the participants made some useful observations and based on their feedback, modifications were made to the interview questions accordingly.

3.17 Sampling Process – Non-Probability Samples

The selectivity that is built into a non-probability sample, according to Cohen et al. (2018, p.217), derives from the researcher targeting a particular group ‘in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself.’ This describes the sampling process undertaken by me to answer the research question. According to Cohen et al. (2018, p.217), ‘Non-probability samples can prove perfectly adequate where researchers do not seek to generalise their findings beyond the sample in question’. I knew that all schools have different characteristics and different contexts, but I was aware that many schools had similarities to this school, and therefore the findings of this study could prove beneficial in the pursuit of knowledge.

3.18 Phase 1 Data Gathering – Quantitative Approach

Once the pilot survey had been completed and the research questionnaire had been revised in accordance with the recommendations of the participants, the questionnaire was distributed to all students in the school for completion. An in-person approach was adopted, and the students used pencil and paper to complete the survey in small groups. It transpired that in addition to students who were absent on that particular day, some students had gone on a trip. The surveys for the teachers and the parents were distributed using Google forms.

Before inputting the findings using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), I prepared a ‘code book’ labelling each of the variables and numbering the possible responses. Once undertaken, the process of using SPSS was quite painstaking, as the data had to be continually reviewed to avoid mistakes.

3.19 Descriptive Analysis – Quantitative

According to Cohen et al. (2018, p.727), ‘descriptive statistics do exactly what they say: they describe and present data’. In the course of the primary research component of this study, broad trends were identified, and descriptive analysis was used to summarise the data for reporting.

3.20 Non-Parametric Analyses

Likert Scales consist of a series of related Likert-type items – the focus of the attitude to be measured (Desselle, 2005; Likert, 1932). According to Willits et al. (2016, p. 127), a balance of both positive and negative items is recommended to reduce response-set bias; ‘subjects indicate their feelings concerning each item on a bipolar scale such as strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree’. Willits et al. (2016) contend that although the method is not without its controversy, Likert scales and Likert-type items have contributed to advancement of knowledge in areas such as sociology, psychology, political science, economics and medicine. The use of Likert scales was more appropriate to my study than single-item questions, as Likert scales are expected, according to Willits et al. (2016, p.128), to ‘yield an index that is more reliable, valid and discriminatory than a single item, single items have considerable random measurement error’.

In relation to the number of items to include in the final scale, according to Willits et al. (2016), no fixed rules exist, but according to Diamantopoulos et al. (2012), at least four are needed for evaluation of internal consistency. I chose five items in the final scale, as Hinkin (1998) suggested that five, six or seven items were adequate for most constructs. Cohen et al., (2018) suggest that useful data can be obtained from Likert scales where instructions to subjects are clear. I endeavoured during all parts of my quantitative approach to ensure that all instructions were clear.

3.21 Phase 2: Qualitative Approach

Purposeful Sampling – Qualitative Approach

According to Cohen et al. (2018, p.219), in purposeful sampling, the researcher handpicks the subjects to be included in the qualitative approach based on the researchers' judgement of their 'typicality or possession of the particular characteristic(s) being sought'. I chose the participants in the interviews based on their in-depth knowledge about all the aspects of the school, due to their experience, expertise or professional role. Though purposeful sampling may not be representative, and the comments of the participants may not be generalisable, this is not the concern in purposeful sampling, according to Cohen et al. (2018, p. 219); 'rather the concern is to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it'.

3.22 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the most common type of interview within a mixed-methods approach, according to Briggs et al. (2012), Cohen et al. (2007), and Morrison (1993), and the interview schedule usually takes the form of a few major questions pertinent to the study, following up with sub-questions or follow-up questions. Follow-up questions usually take the form of probes designed to delve further into the question, and to exact more information from the interviewee. Prompts also enabled me to clarify topics and questions. This is how I conducted the interviews.

I decided to use semi-structured interviews to allow for spontaneity, permitting me to generate follow-up questions, which allow for greater clarity in solving the research problem, as responses may vary in detail and length. The data collected during Phase One of this study namely, the survey, completed in May 2021, was used to inform the questions for the

interviews. These interviews reported on how the school is now (in 2021), in comparison to what it was like in 2005. The interviews took place in person during from 2nd June to 30th June 2021. They were transcribed using *otter.au* initially and later transcribed to Microsoft Word. The strategy used during the course of the interviews came from the teachings of Karl Rogers. I learned this approach while training to become a guidance counsellor and found it a very effective tool for conducting all interviews. According to Rogers and Wood (1974), in order to foster a growth-promoting climate, three elements are required from the interviewer: empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

3.23 Data-Analysis Interviews

NVivo 11 was used as the data analysis tool for the Interviews part of this research. Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, the transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo. To ensure anonymity throughout analysis, each participant's name was changed in the transcripts to their role – for example for an interview with a teacher, the name of the participant was changed to 'Teacher' plus a letter of the alphabet, and any mention of the teacher's name throughout the interview was deleted.

Once the transcript files were uploaded to NVivo, each participant was assigned an attribute value of either: Past Pupil, Parent, Ancillary Staff, Student, Teacher, or Senior Management. This was to further organise the data on NVivo and to act as an aid in the analysis. Once NVivo was set up and ready, I began the analysis. The method I used for the data analysis of the interviews was Thematic Analysis.

There are many different ways to approach thematic analysis. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework throughout the analysis of the Interviews:

Phase 1: Becoming Familiar with the Data – Transcribing the data helped me become familiar with the data. Reading/re-reading the interview transcripts multiple times on multiple occasions enabled me to get a good sense of what is being said. Due to constant reading, I became familiar with the depth and breadth of the content.

Phase 2: Generate Initial Codes – I read through the interviews, highlighting interesting aspects of each of the participant’s responses – writing down a word that described what they were talking about (this word is the code).

Phase 3: Search for Themes – In reviewing the codes, similarities were identified, and I could then generate themes; codes were reorganised and renamed under more descriptive headings called ‘themes’. There were recurrent themes in my data. I created ‘Miscellaneous’ for codes that did not fit into any themes, in case I needed to relook at them at a later stage.

Phase 4: Reviewing the Themes – I assessed whether my themes made sense. Some of the candidate themes were not themes, as there was not enough data to support them. I checked if the wording of themes was accurate, and some of the themes’ wording were changed to make them more succinct and precise. If some of the themes were very similar, I brought them together under one broader theme, and if some themes were too broad, I broke them down into separate themes, always double checking the data to ensure that I did not miss any themes.

Phase 5: Defining the Themes: – Here I was looking at what the theme is saying. For this step I was able to separate my themes into Old Regime and New Regime.

Phase 6: Writing Report: – For this part I wrote up my findings, and I told the story of my data to convince the reader of the merit and validity of my analysis.

It is noteworthy that although this researcher used NVivo, having used manual data analysis (paper and highlighters) in previous research, I reverted to the latter method as it gave more of a sense of what each participant was describing and therefore the themes became self-evident. This method gave this researcher a more in-depth overview of the themes.

3.24 Qualitative Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2013, p.174), qualitative analysis asks questions ‘like what’s going on here? and how can we make sense of these accounts?’ Qualitative research is often said to employ inductive thinking or inductive reasoning, since it moves from specific observations about individual occurrences to broader generalisations and theories. The method used in this study was ‘inductive’ as the emergent themes were strongly linked to the data.

3.25 Validity and Reliability – Qualitative Approach

According to Cohen et al. (2018, p.271), one of the main causes of invalidity is ‘bias’. The researcher must ensure as far as possible that the content of the questions remains unbiased, and also that the interviewer’s own attitudes remain unbiased, including avoiding leading questions. I spent some time focusing and reflecting on whether the questions were unbiased, and ensuring that my own attitudes were not evident in the interview questions, being an insider-researcher. I was mindful of the advice from Cohen et al. (2018, p.271) to avoid bias by ‘careful formulation of questions so that the meaning is crystal clear’. My training in counselling was of benefit during this process also. In addition, Kvale’s (1996) suggestion that researchers should check the reliability, validity and consistency of responses by well-placed questioning guided the formulation of my questions.

On the other hand, McGrath et al. (2019, p.1004) claim that ‘the interviewer should not be viewed as someone contaminating or biasing the data, but rather as a co-creator of data together with the interviewee’. In addition, they argue that as a result of the interviewer’s previous knowledge, ‘the interviewer is not a passive player in the interview, but an instrument using his/her abilities, experiences and competencies in the interview situation’. According to Braun and Clarke (2013, pp.36-37), in qualitative research, our subjectivity, our humaneness can be used as a research tool but ‘to do qualitative research well, and to use subjectivity in this way, it needs to be thought about and considered’. They conclude that the way to do this is by being reflexive. Reflexivity, they suggest, is an essential requirement for conducting good qualitative research.

3.26 Reflexivity

Russell and Bohan (1999) define reflexivity as a process of honouring oneself in one’s work through an awareness of the relational and reflective nature of the task. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), learning to think about your behaviour and thoughts, as well as the phenomenon under study, creates a way to continuously become a better researcher. As a guidance counsellor, I interviewed hundreds of students over a five-year period, and I was mindful of the above in relation to conducting interviews. I was introduced to reflective journaling during the course of my training and continued to use it during my principalship. Since I was the ‘instrument’ of data collection and analysis in this study, I deemed reflexivity to be essential. Thus, I commenced journaling during the course of this entire study. I kept a reflective journal, outlining any worries or anxieties regarding bias which arose during the management of each phase of this study, and how I dealt with same.

I started with the preconceived ideas that I had in relation to themes that were critical in my study such as school improvement, teacher performance, academic achievement, discipline and school inspection. I commenced my journaling, questioning whether I could be objective around the consequences of inspections in my school from 2005 until 2021, and be objective on whether the recommendations of the inspection reports did in fact provide me as principal with a roadmap for school improvement by implementing and enacting the said recommendations in my own school.

Some of the pre-conceived ideas which arose were for example my ideas on what a good/great school is – not only as a teacher, guidance counsellor and principal, but as a parent as well. My journal entries testify to some of my concerns during the course of my study, for example: what do the students really think of the quality of education we offer them in the school? Are the students happy/fulfilled in the school? Did I concentrate too much on academic achievement? Did I listen enough to student voice? Is the school a respectful place for all students? In implementing the recommendations of the inspections, did I pace the changes correctly? Was I too tough on teachers who struggled with the changes? Could I have done things differently?

I also wrote my notes while they arose in my head, as my journal was always accessible (in my handbag!). These notes allowed me during the course of my study to interrogate and examine my ideas, feelings and thoughts in light of bias which might be influencing my research. I made use of my reflective journal to work through some of these concerns and many more during the course of the study, by carrying out reflective exercises related to research purpose and trustworthiness, as recommended by Maxwell (1996).

Advice from Anfara et al. (2002, p.29) to be open and aware of bias in qualitative research struck a chord and I feel that this advice should apply to all of the research process: they stress that we should reflect on ‘how we account for ourselves, how we reveal that world of secrets’. I sought to reveal my world. Functional reflexivity requires giving critical attention to the way our research tools and process may have influenced the research. Personal reflexivity is about making the researcher visible as part of the process. This might involve identifying who we are as researchers, our embodiment (Burns, 2003; Rice, 2009), or how our assumptions can shape the knowledge produced. Being mindful of this danger of bias, I used reflexivity as part of the essential quality control.

3.27 Power and Position

The researcher is often seen to be in a position of power in relation to the participants, particularly if the participants are of school-going age. As principal of the school, I was acutely aware of this position of power. I had submitted my resignation as principal of the school some months (March 2021) in advance of the surveys and interviews. Indeed, the surveys were administered just prior to the summer examinations, at the end of the summer term, when students would have known that I was not returning to the school. At the time of the interviews, my successor was appointed so the students may have perceived that it was the end of my tenure. I was extremely mindful, as Brooks et al. (2014, p.106) suggest, that

A researcher with greater awareness of the shifts in the interviewer and interviewee power and the emotional labour in the interview context will better understand the nuances of the data, will glean greater information about the interviewee and the research topic, and have greater insights into the interview process, the participants and the nature of the topics on which the project focuses.

I therefore strategically conducted the surveys and interviews at the end of the academic year and at the end of my principalship. I also stressed to all participants that the validity of the study would be based on the objectivity of all of the participants involved. I was acutely aware, as Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p.137) suggest, that ‘researchers ... must be acutely aware of possible or likely asymmetries of power and take appropriate steps to address the ethical issues that such awareness raises’. During the course of my years as principal, surveys and interviews were carried out routinely to ascertain student and teacher views on various organisational matters. Research was also carried out by members of staff as part of teaching and learning, as part of the School Self-Evaluation process, or as part of a post-graduate requirement for a Masters’ qualification. PISA tests were also carried out in the school for many years as part of the national test. Researchers from universities undertook both quantitative and qualitative research in the school regularly. The students in the school were well used to studies being carried out and as all studies were clearly explained to them, including this particular study, they appreciated that high value was placed on their opinions on the quality of their educational experience in the school.

Baumrind (1964) warns of the possible failure on the researchers’ part to be grateful to the participants for their services. This can be averted, he suggests, if researchers are prepared to spend a few minutes with participants (survey participants and interviewees) to thank them for their participation in the study, answer any questions they may have, and reassure them that they did well. I carried out this practice during the course of the entire study.

3.28 Presentation of Findings to Participants

All participants in the interview phase of this study were offered the opportunity and strongly encouraged by me to read over the transcript of their interview at their leisure. It is worth noting

that all participants availed of the opportunity to read the transcript of their own interview. This allowed the participants to review their responses to be certain that they were content with their contribution or to make any amendments if they so desired. This process provided another method of verification and validity. In terms of validity, reliability and rigour, Stake (1995, p.107) asks the following questions regarding data validation: ‘All the way through our case study work, we wonder, “Do we have it right?” not only “Are we generating a comprehensive and accurate description of the case?” but “Are we developing the interpretations we want?”’. These were the questions which informed my decisions throughout the entire process of this study.

3.29 Research Ethics

According to Cohen et al. (2018, p.134), the ‘relevance of the principle of informed consent becomes apparent at an early stage of the research project – that of access to the institution or organisation where the research is to be conducted and acceptance by those whose permission is needed before embarking on the task’. Cohen et al. (2018) caution the researcher that he/she cannot expect access as a matter of right. Iigen and Bell (2001) advises researchers to gain permission early on in the research journey. I gained informed consent for my study from the Board of Management of the school and from all participants well in advance of the commencement of this study.

3.30 Collecting and Analysing Data

For the questionnaire issued to students, parents and teachers, written consent/assent was received from all the relevant parties. For the interviews conducted as part of this case study, documentation was sent to all participants; this included plain-language statements (see Appendix) and informed-consent forms (see Appendix).

Briggs et al. (2012, p.100) acknowledge that participating in any research involves risks; when a researcher invites participants to take part in a study, he/she must protect all participants from harm or any violation of their privacy, as 'the sovereignty of the individual is critical'. No participant must feel under pressure to participate. I was mindful and applied this important ethical principle. Data analysis must also be ethical and it must not misrepresent findings (Silverman 2017; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The researcher has an ethical responsibility to ensure that the results of the research are reported fairly and accurately. Potential conflict of interest must be disclosed. I realised from the outset that it was important and necessary to disclose the fact that I was the principal of the school at the centre of this study.

Protecting the participant's right to privacy was paramount. One way of protecting a participant's right to privacy, according to Cohen et al. (2018), is through the assurance of confidentiality. Confidentiality means not disclosing information from a participant in any way that might identify that individual. Creating a secure research environment means ensuring that all conversations and all other information (e.g., surveys) are conducted and stored securely during and after the study. All information must be rendered anonymous for storage, and online responses suitably coded to ensure participant privacy. Storage was in a locked cabinet and all on-line responses were coded to ensure privacy. This ethic of confidentiality ensures that the researcher keeps faith with those who have voluntarily participated in a study. This is particularly important for an insider researcher who may be known to the participants, as I was in the case of this study.

Since the undertaking of research does entail intrusion and disruption, Cohen et al. (2018) recommend that amicable relations be fostered from the outset. If the research study involves

a school, then the question of access will have to be extended beyond the participants in the school and sometimes terms may have to be negotiated. As this research study was based on a school, and although the researcher was an insider-researcher, all permissions had to be sought according to the code of ethics. At the early negotiation stage, a statement of conditions and guarantees were given by this researcher. The question of ethics was central to this research and therefore before commencing this research, ethical approval to undertake this study was sought from Dublin City University (DCU). This research qualified under DCU's 'Notification Procedure as a low-risk social research project'. The DCU Research Ethics Committee approved this project (see Appendix). This researcher contends that this research maintained and upheld high ethical standards for all the phases of this research study.

3.31 Limitations of This Study

This researcher realises that this study relies solely on the views of participants in this mixed-methods research, as opposed to supplementing this data using other methodologies, for example ethnographic work. In this mixed-methods study, quantitative research has the dominant status and is subject to the weaknesses of that particular approach. This researcher is also conscious of power relations and insider status. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 136) remind researchers that 'the researcher is often seen to be, or is, in an asymmetric position of power with regard to the participants; the former may have more power than the latter, be this by status, position, knowledge, role or whatever'. I had to take on board and remain mindful of the fact that being the principal of the school, and despite the strengths of my position in terms of the research, the participants may have told me what they perceived I wanted to hear. I had to be alert to all of these possibilities during the course of this study.

Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that the researcher also decides what counts as acceptable and useful data, and that this must be taken into account during the duration of the study. This again is a critical consideration in light of my being an insider-researcher. Ball et al. (2013) remind researchers that narratives can be rehearsed for interviews. McGrath et al. (2019) further remind researchers that participants might be overly enthusiastic and keen to give good accounts of the institution. I had to take all of these limitations on board during the course of this study.

In addition to the large cohort of students and parents who participated in the survey, it may have been useful to have researched the views of past pupils using a quantitative approach. This was not possible due to a number of factors but particularly due to restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic; this is regarded as a limitation.

3.32 Conclusion

This chapter has described my epistemological and ontological position. It has described the methods of the research design, the data collection, the analysis procedures, and the methods of verification which were used to ensure validity and reliability of the findings. The methods, and research design which were selected by this researcher are justified as the best methods available to answer the research question. Ethical considerations are outlined, and the research integrity principles are indicated. Chapter 4 will now present the research findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings presented here are an understanding of the pertinent data, choosing the relevant data for the findings and drawing conclusions from the findings that are meaningful to the reader, and relevant to the research question. The findings which are presented here are from the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative methods that were used as part of a mixed-methods approach to answer the research question. The research question is ‘did the recommendations from three whole school evaluations from 2005 to 2018, which were implemented and enacted by the principal, provide a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in a rural voluntary secondary school in Ireland?’

This chapter is divided into three parts, as outlined below:

Part 1 – An analysis of the themes. These themes arose from the three WSE inspection reports of 2005, 2015 and 2018.

Part 2 – Old-Regime Findings. This contains the findings from the ‘Old Regime’ qualitative research. ‘Old Regime’ is the term used to describe the school up to and including 31st August 2005 (which encompasses the time period covering the WSE Inspection report of 2005).

Part 3 – New-Regime Findings. This presents both the quantitative and qualitative findings from the New Regime analysis. ‘New Regime’ is the term used to describe the period of time from 1st September 2005 to 31st August 2021.

Part 1: Documentary Analysis of WSE (2005), WSE-MLL (2015) and FTI (2018)

4.2 Introduction to Documentary Analysis

The first step in this study was to analyse the following three inspection reports: WSE (2005), MLL-WSE (2015) and the Follow Through Inspection (2018). By implementing an inductive approach, I analysed these reports and was able to group the major findings under the following three themes:

Theme 1: Teaching and Learning

Theme 2: Leadership and Management

Theme 3: School Climate

In this section, the main recommendations and demands of the inspection teams, the changes made to implement and enact the demands, and the impact of the changes in the school in the following inspection reports are presented and discussed under the three same themes, namely, Teaching and Learning, Leadership and Management, and School Climate.

4.3 Theme 1: Teaching and Learning WSE (2005)

Introduction

Under the theme of Teaching and Learning (WSE, 2005), three sub-themes were discovered in the data. These were as follows: Streaming; Methodologies; Behaviour in the Classroom.

According to Munna and Kalam (2021, p.1),

‘teaching and learning process can be identified as a transformation process of knowledge from teachers to students ... the combination of various elements within the

process where an educator identifies and establishes the learning objectives and develops teaching resources and implements the teaching and learning strategy’.

The above quotation identifies that the teaching-and-learning process is a transfer of knowledge from teachers to students. The teacher identifies the learning objectives of the lesson, and uses various methodologies and resources to implement the teaching and learning strategy so that quality learning can take place. In the WSE report of 2005, teaching-and-learning processes were found to be questionable in the classrooms. According to Former Inspector 1:

... the object of teaching and learning is where the boy or girl is empowered to be able to identify their learning goals and their learning pace in the context of a lesson which is facilitated by a teacher who does not have to prove to anybody that they are masters of their subjects or that they are master practitioners in knowledge delivery, now that would be outstanding teaching.

4.4 Teaching and Learning (WSE, 2005): Streaming

Streaming, which was a policy in the school up to 2005, is defined by Daniels (1961, p.119) as a method of school organisation, which allows children to progress, educationally ‘at their own natural pace’ bright children are, it is believed held back by being taught in classes containing duller pupils, whilst duller pupils tend to be overawed and subsequently are retarded by the presence of brighter pupils in their classes ... the evidence suggests that streaming does not have these effects-rather that the contrary is true.

Streaming in this school was determined by each student’s results in an entrance examination at age twelve, of which one test was objective and at least three were subjective tests, set by

teachers in the school. According to Johnston and Wildy (2016, p.43), ‘More often the research (on streaming) paints a negative picture of the practice’. Indeed, Hattie (2008) concludes that the effects (of streaming) on equity are negative and profound. This was found to be the case in this school; students sat exams at levels much lower than their abilities suggested, and this resulted in fewer life chances for them. It also led to a feeling that they were not academic, and this in turn left them with low esteem, which also affected their well-being.

The main recommendations and demands of the inspection teams (WSE 2005):

Inspectors recommended mixed-ability classes rather than streaming. Inspectors recommended that far more students should sit higher-level papers in State examinations, in line with national norms. They noted that ‘The number of students taking foundation level (core subject, i.e. Maths or English) at Leaving Certificate is significantly higher than the national average. Quite a high proportion of students take ordinary level in too many subjects. These situations should be addressed’.

The changes made to implement and enact the demands:

The incoming principal took up office in September 2005; however, with regard to streaming, the timetable was already arranged for the academic year 2005/2006, with streaming being the norm once again. The principal with the involvement of staff introduced mixed-ability classes from the academic year 2006/2007 onwards for all first, second, and fifth-year students. The situation was more complex for the third and sixth-year groups; for these students, streaming was abolished in 2006/2007 on a case-by-case basis.

Subsequent to the inspectors’ recommendations in this regard, the principal and a small team of teachers completed an analysis of the levels sat by students in the school in the State

examinations. The findings of this analysis indicated, in keeping with what the inspectors reported, that the academic levels taken by students in the school in State examinations were way below the national norm. This fact was presented to staff at two extended staff meetings and following consultation, a subsequent directive from the principal was issued that all students were to sit higher level in all subjects henceforth, unless there was a specific educational reason to the contrary. Such requests would need to be signed off by the principal, in consultation with the Special Education Needs (SEN) team.

Impact of Inspectors’ Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

Due to streaming being abolished as per the inspectors’ recommendations, and due to the subsequent changes made by the principal including introducing mixed-ability classes from 2006/2007, students were no longer negatively affected by an entrance test taken when they were twelve years of age.

The impact of the inspectors’ recommendations to move to mixed-ability classes, and the subsequent changes made by the principal and staff to do so, meant that many more students sat higher-level papers. This led to an improvement in academic achievement. In turn, this led to an increase in the number of students who attended higher education. This can be seen from the table and graph below, which show the progression rates from this school to higher education from 2005-2020. This data is based off the Feeder School Tables released in the ‘Irish Times’ newspaper each year. (See Figure 1 below).

Year	Total Progression to Third Level as a % of Leaving Certificate class
2005	44.32%
2010	77%

2015	87%
2018	84%
2019	91%
2020	96%

Figure 1(a)

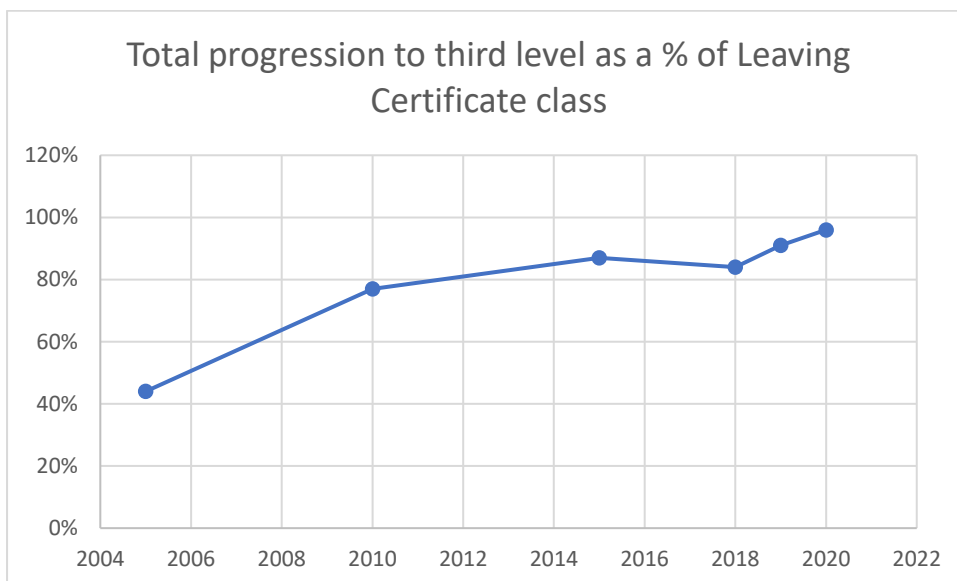


Figure 1(b)

Note: Students who travel outside of the Republic of Ireland to study at higher-education institutions are not represented.

4.5 Methodologies WSE 2005

A methodology is a system of practices and procedures that a teacher uses to teach.

The main recommendations and demands of the inspection teams:

The inspectors recommended that the methodologies used by the teachers in the school be updated, to promote active learning and student participation in the classroom. Such methodologies, they contended, should include group work; pair work; the use of higher and lower-order questioning. The inspectors also recommended the use of differentiation; the use

of stimulating materials; the use of ICT to develop student writing skills; and that audio texts should be used to assist student understanding.

The changes made to implement and enact the demands:

A decision was made by the principal to make attendance at in-service provided by the Department of Education mandatory, in order to widen the variety of methodologies used by the teachers in the school. In light of the deficits in methodology in the classroom, it was fortuitous that during a subject inspection in later years, and following a conversation with an inspector, the Instructional Leadership programme by Professor Barrie Bennett was introduced by the principal to fill the methodology gap in the school. According to the then Chief Inspector Hislop (Instructional Leadership Programme, 2021, p.17):

Instructional Leadership provided a perspective and a professional development model for teachers and school leaders, which encouraged a focus on leadership of learning throughout our schools, the principles and practices embedded in the Instructional Leadership programme support Department of Education and Skills policy in many ways.

Instructional leadership is a model of school leadership in which a principal works with teachers to provide support and guidance in establishing best practices in teaching. Principals use this model of leadership to communicate with their staff and together set clear goals related to student achievement.

Instructional leadership proved to be an exciting and innovative programme which suited the needs of the school. It allowed the senior management team and many teachers to train in the theory of instructional leadership, which facilitated the implementation of a variety of

methodologies to promote active learning and student participation in the classroom. All participants from the school acquired an instruction repertoire, with guidance for extending it and integrating it into teaching and learning. It had a very positive outcome on teaching and learning in the school. Participants were asked to share their new knowledge with colleagues, and they duly did so.

External speakers, including Professor Barrie Bennett, were invited to staff meetings in the initial years to discuss the use of different methodologies. In addition, the principal encouraged the staff to join Subject Associations. Increased funds for ICT were provided jointly by the parents' fundraising efforts and the Department of Education, which facilitated teachers to use an increased variety of methodologies with the students. Whiteboards were installed in every classroom; desktop computers were purchased for teachers; iPads™ and subsequently Laptops were purchased for each individual teacher. Hundreds of iPads™ were purchased incrementally over the years for students' use. Teachers in the school shared their expertise with their colleagues to facilitate an increased use of ICT in the classroom; this was further developed when the global pandemic struck, which enabled all teachers to teach online.

Current Student A noted:

'During Covid, some teachers that wouldn't have used technology in class before, definitely were taught to do so. It was obvious, they know how to use zoom, you-tube, videos and stuff which is great, as there was a lot of online learning during Covid'.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

There was a noticeable change in the use of methodologies from 2005 onwards, in particular as a result of attendance at the Instructional Leadership in-service; these methodologies

included think, pair, share, Bloom's Taxonomy, higher and lower-order questioning and feedback. In addition, peer observation was initiated, which led to increased teacher collaboration; all of these methodologies pertained to instructional leadership.

Attendance at Subject Associations also provided a framework for learning and discussion of examination-paper structure, syllabi and methodologies. This new tradition helped to broaden academic horizons and created networking possibilities. In addition, attendance at Department of Education in-service, along with talks on various methodologies from external speakers, facilitated teachers to add to their repertoire of methodologies, which in turn made classes more varied and interesting for students.

Teacher T speaks about the staff inculcating instructional leadership into the repertoire of methodologies in the school.

'I asked them (the teachers) what sort of methodologies they were using, or why they were doing certain things. The teachers were actually very well able to explain what they were doing, all pertaining to instructional leadership ... there was a lot of collaborate practice going on and you could see it in their teaching. They're very willing to share it with newer teachers and to promote it and explain how it works and to invite you into their classrooms to see it in action and see how it improves the learning outcomes for students'.

4.6 Behaviour in the Classroom (WSE 2005)

In 2005, the inspectors were informed by staff that there were behaviour problems not only in classrooms, but also throughout the school during the Old Regime. According to Parsonson (2012, p.16):

Behaviour problems in the classroom increase the stress levels for teachers and pupils, disrupt the flow of lessons and conflict with both learning objectives and the processes of learning.

This adequately describes the situation in this school at that time. The dynamic in most classrooms amounted to a shift of attention from academic tasks to the distractions caused by the majority of students by their disruptive behaviour.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

The inspectors demanded that disruption must come to an end so that the teachers could teach and the students could learn.

The Changes made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

The principal had to immediately initiate major changes in the protocol of reporting disruptive classroom behaviour. Students were being sent out of class to the office for misbehaviour in very great numbers every day. This situation was considered untenable by the principal. Therefore, a protocol was initiated, in which the classroom teacher had to outline the misdemeanour in a written note and send it down to the office. The principal would then follow a protocol of reading the contents to the student, and would wait to speak to the teacher. If appropriate, parents were invited to speak to the principal that day or the following day to expediate the situation. This protocol took up enormous administrative time but the benefits were noticeable in due course.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

The impact of the new protocol was almost immediate. After approximately ten to twelve weeks, the targeted student population and their parents quickly learned that interruption of teaching and learning would no longer be tolerated. A zero-tolerance approach was introduced by the principal to combat interruption of teaching and learning, which up to then had been endemic in the school. Past Pupil J said:

'It felt as a student, that bad behaviour was not acceptable anymore, and honestly, it felt that if students did step out of line that there would be consequences. No wasn't taken for an answer, this woman meant business.'

4.7 Theme 2: Leadership and Management (WSE 2005)

The quality framework (DES, 2016, p.7) sees leadership and management as inseparable. It sees leadership as being focused on creating and sustaining an environment in a school that is conducive to good learning, and asserts that effective leadership is essential for a school to be a place where successful learning happens. Schools must be managed effectively also so both leadership and management are key skillsets that are employed to serve a school's core work, which is teaching and learning.

In this school, according to the inspectors, these skillsets were not in evidence. The report stated that in terms of teaching and learning, there was no formal subject-department structure in the school. There was also no school plan, which was in contravention of the 1998 Education Act. These lacunae were the responsibility of the Leadership and Management team, but particularly the principal. Former Inspector 2 discussed different styles of leadership:

I saw many different styles of leadership; the problem is to assess whether it is working or not. You have the marketeers, someone said that they meet you in the foyer, they sort of overwhelm you, they come out with this bonhomie, they are probably pillars of the

society ... and the other end of the spectrum, if you like, you have the sort of accidental principal, everybody else falls away. I have never been able to work out which of those two styles is the best, because I believe that most styles evolve as you progress, you have a certain role and then you evolve because of experience and other people's input.

Former Inspector 2 stated, on effective schools:

I would always suggest that it is the principal who will determine whether a school is effective or not, because the principal sets the tone, sets the pattern, the buck stops there, he/she makes all of the decisions. It is really a very demanding but important role particularly as the quality of teaching and learning for the students ultimately lies with the principal.

Former Inspector 2 said, on the importance of the senior management team and the staff:

The staffroom and the office, they are the two that determine whether there is real collaboration to ensure that high standards are achieved to facilitate a quality education for the students and a successful school.

Former Inspector 1 stated, speaking in terms of staff collaboration in distributed leadership:

Give them (the staff) a fair opportunity to come up with whatever they come up with, be able to agree what is important and what is not. Then be able to make a decision. If they are dragging their feet too much, it's a tough call.

Former Inspector 1 pondered the likely effects of a post-of-responsibility dispute in a time of distributed leadership in schools:

If there was a post of responsibility dispute now, you would hope that such a directive would probably shut the schools, because if it does, it means that leadership is distributed, if it does not, it means that leadership is not distributed and therefore not that effective because a school's success cannot depend on two, three or four people.

Former Inspector 1 noted, on the subject of principalship:

If you went into a school and you discovered that there was a principal who was taking themselves too seriously, that is not good leadership. If you went into a school where the whole community was upset, because the principal had too much energy, that is not good either. So what is it then? It's really a dynamic, that goes on in school, where the principal brings their vision, their competencies, their ability to a school, but in the context of where the school is, and then moves the school forward at the school's pace.

Former Inspector I noted, on the principal retiring from his/her school.

If a principal's retirement leaves a void, that is not good. The school should be able to run effectively without the principal. That does not mean that the principal will not be missed, but if the school does not run effectively without the principal, the principal would have to question the effectiveness of leadership during his/her tenure.

The second theme concerning WSE (2005) is Leadership and Management and the sub-headings for this theme are: Strategic Planning; Roles of Senior and Middle Management; Behaviour in the School; the School Library.

4.8 Strategic Planning (WSE 2005)

A strategic plan is a document that informs all stakeholders in a school what the school wants to achieve in the future and how it plans to get there. The plan usually outlines why the school exists (purpose) and how the students and staff should behave (values). A strategic plan was urgently recommended in 2005, as the school was facing closure.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

The inspectors recommended that the board direct and drive a strategic plan incorporating major changes such as liaising with the school community, improving the school plant, urgently addressing discipline issues in the school, raising the reputation of the school in the community, and improving school pride. It was noted by the inspectors that a concerted effort would be needed by all to safeguard and ensure the future of the school.

In the context of declining numbers, the inspectors recommended that meaningful implementation meetings take place regularly between middle and senior management. The absenteeism rate of students in the school was found by the inspectors to be above the national average; this, they cautioned, needed to be addressed.

It was recommended that staff be given further opportunities to meet during the year in order to facilitate professional discussion and planning for subject areas. Once a year at the beginning of the academic year was deemed by the inspectors to be insufficient. The 1998 Education Act made the preparation of a school plan mandatory:

21.- (1) A board shall make arrangements for the preparation of a plan and shall ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated. (Education Act, 1998)

It was reported by senior management that there have been unsuccessful efforts to initiate the development of a school plan. The inspectors therefore recommended that, in compliance with the Education Act (1998), the board of management make immediate arrangements for the preparation of the school plan.

A post-of-responsibility review was demanded immediately by the inspectors to meet the needs of the school, as the structure in place was not deemed to be fit for purpose. In addition, it was recommended that senior management provide as wide a subject choice as possible. While senior management did advise the inspectors that reviews of bands and subject choices were carried out regularly, the inspectors demanded that a review take place on a yearly basis to meet the needs of in-coming fifth-year students.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

All staff were invited to form a group to help with strategic planning, and eight members of staff opted voluntarily to join the principal on this group. A school plan was developed, which focused on improving discipline and academic achievement, as these were critical issues to be addressed if the school was to survive. A strategic three-year plan was also developed by the planning team, ratified by staff and the board of management. In relation to subject choice, the principal provided the students with a totally inclusive range of subjects to choose from on a yearly basis from the academic year 2005/2006 onwards, thereby introducing a change from previous years.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

The strategic planning group met once a week during the first year and subsequently once a fortnight thereafter for five years, then once a month in years seven and eight as more and more

improvements became evident. The initial issues included behaviour, uniform, vandalism, absenteeism, declining numbers and academic achievement. Staff groups were formed on a gradual basis and took over many of the responsibilities of the initial strategic planning group.

The Post of Responsibility (POR) review, which was demanded by the inspectors, was firstly facilitated by an outside facilitator. This proved contentious, as the senior postholders wanted to maintain their former roles as part of 'custom and practice'. After consultation with senior post holders, the principal eventually brought the process of the review to the whole staff, and it was eventually concluded with some compromises. It was agreed by the majority of staff that all 'A' post holders (now known as Assistant Principal 1) would be year heads with overall responsibility for the pastoral, academic and discipline needs of their year group. This led to student sanctions being implemented when necessary in a much more cohesive way, and eventually led to improved student behaviour both inside and outside of the classroom. Due to the revised POR for year heads, there was a sharp decrease in the number of students presenting at the principal's office due to interruption of teaching and learning. This sharp improvement had a noticeable impact on school climate, both inside and outside the classroom.

The impact of the subject-choice review, which was now student led, meant that students were now choosing subjects they liked and/or were good at, which in turn led to improved academic achievement and consequent well-being. Regular timetabled subject-department meetings, which were scheduled throughout the academic year, led to increased collaboration and professional dialogue, eventually leading to strategies such as common papers, common marking schemes and the use of triangulation. As the school was in a difficult space regarding enrolment and even its survival, there were many changes brought about by the planning team. Some proved difficult to get over the line, but the staff understood that unless large-scale

changes demanded by the inspectors were implemented and enacted, the survival of the school was in doubt. In the 2005 WSE report, the inspectors stated that a concerted effort would be needed by all to safeguard and ensure the future of the school.

4.9 Role of Senior and Middle Management (WSE 2005)

According to Circular 04/98 (Department of Education and Skills, 1998),

the principal and deputy-principal and holders of posts of responsibility together form the in-school management team for the school. The principal has overall authority under the authority of the Board of Management/manager for the day-to-day management of the school.

According to the inspectors, the role of principal and deputy-principal in the school was not defined nor did they find the middle management structure in the school in line with Circular 04/98. Former Inspector 1 stated, on review of posts of responsibility.

The whole idea of post of responsibility reviews, came from the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and the reason for that was in the Voluntary Secondary Schools, more than the Community and Comprehensive Sector or the Vocational Sector (now known as the Educational and Training Board (ETB)), the posts of responsibility were seen to be almost sinecures. You got the job because you were the longest serving member.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

According to the inspectors, the role of principal and deputy principal in the school was not defined, nor did they find the middle-management structure in the school to be in line with circular 04/98. It was recommended that senior management should take the opportunity

urgently to redefine their respective roles and to determine their collective responsibilities. The inspectors found no evidence of a common purpose or a shared understanding of the role of middle management in the school. This lacuna had to be urgently addressed.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

The principal and the deputy met prior to the school reopening in September 2005 to discuss the redefining of their different roles and to determine their collective responsibilities. This was agreed.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

All the staff, per 04/98, became aware of the different responsibilities of the principal, the deputy, and post-holders. It was restated that the principal had ultimate responsibility for running the school. There was now a greater understanding that although staff would be consulted in all matters, the overriding decision was the responsibility of the principal. As a result, the principal was able to drive much-needed reforms more speedily.

4.10 Behaviour in the School (WSE 2005)

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

The inspectors opined that the fragmentation of the overall disciplinary structure in the school, including the monitoring of absenteeism and the wearing of the correct uniform, led to a situation where it was not at all clear who exactly was responsible for which area, and that this also led to a consistent lack of follow-through or appropriate sanctions. The duties and responsibilities of all teachers were to enforce the code of behaviour in a consistent manner, according to the inspectors.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

The principal initiated a whole-staff approach to enforcing the code of behaviour consistently and fairly, in order to eliminate the fragmentation of the disciplinary structure; this became a consistent item on the agenda at every staff meeting. This involved informing everybody of the disciplinary ladder of referral and in addition, informing all teachers of their duty and responsibility as professionals to maintain classroom management in their own classes, to allow students to learn and teachers to teach. Teachers were asked to be vigilant on the corridors as well.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

All teachers were informed of their individual duty and responsibility to ensure that good behaviour prevailed in the school. The principal informed staff that it was everybody's responsibility to enforce the code of behaviour, that a co-ordinated effort by all was required and that no exceptions would apply. Slowly but surely, the school reverted to the expectations of the inspectors, thus becoming a school which centred on respect where teaching and learning was prioritised. Some staff stayed in school on a Wednesday (half-day) to discuss the implementation of all of the inspectors' recommendations. Discipline was prioritised as without discipline, it was considered that no teaching and learning would take place.

4.11 School Library (WSE 2005)

The advantages of reading for pleasure have been studied by Whitten, Labby and Sullivan (2016). The results indicated that students who chose to read for pleasure performed better in English, Mathematics and History. Educators who were interviewed about their students in this study had observed higher-level vocabulary, an advanced ability to communicate in writing across content areas, and increased fluency in their students who chose to read.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

As the school library was closed at the time of the inspection, the inspectors recommended that the re-opening of the library should be a matter of priority, and that organisation of this should be looked at in the context of the overall post structure of the school.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

The principal and members of staff undertook to re-stock and re-open the library to encourage reading for leisure by the students; fundraising by the parents greatly contributed to this endeavour.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

The impact of the re-opening of the library was that more students used it. This was facilitated by staff volunteers; the English and History departments were particularly instrumental in facilitating access to the library at lunchtime and after school. In time, the library became a well-used resource in the school by the students; there was a noticeable increase in the number of students who read for leisure. In sum, it was perceived that pleasure reading did increase academic achievement in the school, and that it was not confined to the classroom but was transmitted into adulthood.

4.12 Theme 3: School Climate (WSE 2005)

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on the interactions, relationships, learning and leadership practices, and organisational structures common among students, parents, teachers, and administrators (Thapa et al., 2013).

The third theme is school climate and the sub-headings for this theme are: Student Voice; The Role of the Class Tutor.

4.13 Student Voice (WSE 2005)

Teachers and students experience the classroom differently; therefore student voice is very significant, according to Parr and Hawe (2022). Keddie (2015) opines that recognising the validity of student voice enhances learning conditions. Charteris and Thomas (2017, p.167) also value student voice; they suggest that ‘a student voice approach can provide further information in the form of a learner lens for teachers to reflect on and take pedagogic action’.

The inclusion of stakeholders’ voice, in this case students, is seen as a distribution of agency and power within an organisation, and is seen as a key driver for school improvement (Hargreaves and Fink, 2012; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). The inspection report of 2005 highlighted the need for the formation of a student council in the school. The Inspectorate in Ireland was well aware of the necessity to include students as key stakeholders who should have a direct influence on all matters pertaining to the school, for example, proposed school policies and organisational structures. Hislop (2017), the then Chief Inspector, emphasised that student voice should not be confined to surveys or focus groups. He opined that the time was right to review and improve the ways in which we access, analyse and use the opinions of students.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

It was recommended in the inspection report to form a student council, which could be used as a forum to discuss the necessary changes required regarding student behaviour in terms of

vandalism and other anti-social behaviour. Buy-in was necessary from the students, as they formed a significant part of the solution.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

As recommended, a student council was formed with representatives from each class in each year group. Student voice was articulated through the student council, where issues such as student behaviour and proposed school policies were discussed. The introduction of the Student Council was welcomed by the students, and they now had a legitimate platform to air their views on the running of the school. They gradually took ownership of the need for all in the school to change in order to effect improvement.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

The formation of the Student Council in the academic year 2005/2006 was highly significant. Student behaviour was discussed, as well as vandalism and anti-social behaviour. The students were aware of the situation, and they facilitated the principal to observe their first meeting. The Student Council discussed ways of improving the situation in the school; regarding behaviour and vandalism, they decided to bring some proposals back to the students in their classes and determined early on that there were no quick solutions to the problems. The students knew that they were part of the solution and that without their input, the school would not be turned around. Interestingly, they were well aware of the situation in the school; it came as no surprise to them that something radical had to be done immediately.

The fact that the students were included in a whole-school discussion meant that their voice mattered and that was significant to them. There is no doubt that the Student Council was instrumental in effecting change in the school. It transpired that the vast majority of students

in the school were embarrassed by the level of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, and wanted to be proactive in making sure that the culprits were caught and punished. This sent a very strong message to the minority who let down their peers by their actions. Vandalism and anti-social behaviour would not have been addressed without the help of the students in the school.

4.14 The Role of the Class Tutor (WSE 2005)

Lodge (2000, p.35) argues that the most effective tutors in secondary schools are those who describe their role 'as someone who helps them learn'. This definition is appropriate in the Irish context, as tutors in Ireland have a pastoral dimension to their role. They give emotional support to all members of their tutor class. The post of tutor is voluntary and unpaid.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

It was recommended that the role of the class tutor be extended to involve discipline in the initial stages.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

The role of the class tutor was not extended to involve discipline, as it is a voluntary and unpaid role and there was a surplus of paid post holders to look after the needs of discipline. The majority of staff supported this view.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

Tutors were pleased that management listened to their concerns, and that they were no longer responsible for discipline outside of their own classes in an unpaid capacity. They were now able to focus on the academic and pastoral-care elements of their role.

4.15 Conclusion (WSE 2005)

It is evident that without the recommendations of the inspectors in the WSE report (2005), and the implementation and enactment of these recommendations by the principal and staff, the changes would not have taken place. The school was in danger of closing; thus immediate action had to be taken by the principal. Without these comprehensive recommendations from the inspectors, it is unlikely that progress on this scale would have been achieved. The WSE report (2005) was the instrument of change.

4.16 A Document Analysis of WSE-MLL 2015 – New Regime

An inspection entitled Whole School Evaluation – Management Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) took place in 2015 in the school that is the focus of this study. The changes demanded by the inspectors in WSE-MLL (2015) will be presented, followed by the changes made by the principal and finally, the impact of these changes will be discussed. All findings presented in this section refer to the New Regime, as outlined in the introduction to Chapter 4: Findings. These findings will be presented under the same three themes used in the WSE (2005), namely, Teaching and Learning; Leadership and Management; School Climate. However, it is worth highlighting that the format of the inspection and the template of the inspection report had changed, resulting in the WSE-MLL (2015) having a much shorter time allocated to each inspection, and a much shorter report furnished to the school than those of 2005.

4.17 Theme 1: Teaching and Learning – New-Regime (WSE-MLL 2015)

No recommendations were made in relation to teaching and learning in this WSE-MLL (2015) report. Former Inspector 2 stated, on the subject of teaching:

A positive progressive teacher will be aiming their lesson at the C grades in their class. In other words, they would bring the core of the class up to a level which some students would not have aspired to, that is where I think the most effective teachers work.

4.18 Theme 2: Leadership and Management – New-Regime (WSE-MLL 2015)

The second theme is Leadership and Management and the sub-headings for this theme are: school plan and staff working groups. The context of the findings is described, namely, the changes demanded by the Inspectorate. Also described are the actual changes made by the principal as a direct result of these recommendations; and the impact of these changes as a result of the WSE-MLL (2015).

4.19 School Plan (WSE-MLL 2015)

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams:

Recommendations (WSE-MLL, 2015) were made by the inspectors in this area relating to the school plan and the formation of working groups:

- The Board of Management should oversee the development of a cohesive school plan.
- Senior Management should create staff working groups in which each group would focus on a particular priority task within a definite time frame.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

All of the documents containing ratified school policies, updated subject and programme plans and key developmental priorities were collated and put into the school plan.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

The school plan became a working document and was subsequently updated at all appropriate times throughout the year. Many of the working groups fed into the school plan, and this plan became a reference point for all staff.

4.20 Staff Working Groups – Distributed Leadership (WSE-MLL 2015)

A distributed-leadership perspective, according to Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), recognises that there are multiple leaders in a school. There is a realisation by principals that staff, students and parents all make a positive impact on a school. An increasing number of studies emphasise a powerful relationship between distributed forms of leadership and positive organisational change (Harris, 2007; Spillane, 2012). According to Harris (2007), the aspiration of transforming schools through the action of individual leaders is quickly diminishing. An alternative theory (distributed leadership) asserts that where leadership is distributed and is understood in terms of shared activities and multiple interactions. This theory importantly contends that the success of distributed leadership depends on the way in which leadership is distributed, how it is distributed and the purpose of distribution.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Team:

The recommendation for further development was that the senior management should, according to the WSE-MLL (2015, p. 2), ‘create staff working groups, groups in which each group would focus on a particular priority task within a definite time frame’. Former Inspector 1 said, on the process and outcomes of SSE:

If I were evaluating the quality of self-evaluation, I think that I would be looking at the dynamic that’s going on at the school. I think outstanding self-evaluation would be where the principal and deputy/deputies facilitate the activities of co-professionals. The ASTI had a wonderful phrase ‘primo inter pares’ (first among equals), it’s a great

phrase because it means that we are all teachers, we are all educators and therefore we take ownership of our role in that context.

Former Inspector 1 stated, on the professional opportunities from SSE:

A school has a phenomenal opportunity through WSE to set its own agenda. If a school begins to use the Inspectorate as the external validator of the school's internal processes arising from SSE, if that is happening in a school, then you have outstanding leadership, I am not sure if we are there yet but it's what we ought to be aspiring to ... For schools to be in conversation with themselves, a continuum would be established where the critical friend otherwise known as the inspector, would come into the school on a fairly regular basis and would pretty much pick up where the school was on the last visit and have a conversation about the journey since and where they are now and where they want to be in the future.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

As a result of distributed leadership, seven professional teams were set up as follows: Literacy, Numeracy, Assessment, Information Technology, Instructional Leadership, Ethos, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). The creation of all of these teams were considered to be a priority task, and all of the teams worked within a definite time frame. The work of each team linked with the SSE process.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

The demands of the inspectors meant that staff were strongly encouraged to engage in teamwork. This came at a time when there were many demands on staff; for example, the professional demands due to the new Junior Certificate, which was introduced on a gradual

basis in 2014, and economic demands due to the pay cuts introduced for staff in 2009 as a consequence of the financial crisis. In spite of these pressures, members of staff formed these groups voluntarily as part of the implementation and enactment of the inspection report.

The members of the working groups displayed many levels of expertise, both in terms of academic reading and skills; particularly beneficial were those who contributed their research skills. Teams met on a very regular basis; they carried out surveys and their findings fed into the SSE process, which incorporated the following aspects: identify the focus, gather data, analyse and making judgments, write and share a short report and improvement plan, put improvement into action and finally monitor actions and evaluate impact. Former Inspector 1 noted of SSE:

School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) did a lot of good work on the process of SSE, but I think that it probably fell down on the product, the measurable outcomes.

The comments of the inspector above pertained to the national body on school development, directly employed by the Department of Education to act as a conduit between the Department and schools in the implementation of School Development Planning. The work of these planning groups in this school, however, was of immense benefit in terms of innovation, expertise, knowledge and experience. All work was completed within a strict timeline, which served the school well in terms of the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The process of building teams in the school led to many professional conversations regarding school improvement.

4.21 Theme 3: School Climate – New-Regime (WSE-MLL 2015)

No recommendations/demands were made in this area. The inspectors (WSE-MLL, 2015, p. 2) noted that ‘student care strategies support high quality development and well-being of students

and are co-ordinated effectively with dedication from teachers'. School climate also reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organisational structures. In sum, the implementation and the enactment of the recommendations of the WSE of 2005 in terms of school climate and student well-being bore great results for this school as evidenced in the WSE-MLL (2015). Former Inspector 1 noted, on the theme of Student Welfare:

Student welfare is almost where a teacher is like a parent to the kid, rather than the system feels that they have to hire in the expertise in order to deal with the wobbles of life ... If you can be a good parent or a good teacher or a good listener, that will solve an awful lot, but sadly society is not going in that direction. I fear that because student welfare is an issue, we are formalising what very often is the informal nature of what teaching is about.

4.22 Conclusion (WSE-MLL 2015)

The summary of the findings below (WSE-MLL 2015, p. 2) indicates that the school has come a way along the journey of school improvement and educational change; however, the school is cognisant that school improvement is an on-going process. These improvements are due to the recommendations of the inspectors in WSE (2005), which were implemented and enacted by the principal.

4.23 Follow Through Inspection (2018)

A Follow Through Inspection (FTI) was carried out in 2018 in the school that is the focus of this study. FTI inspections evaluate the progress a school has made on implementing main recommendations made in an earlier inspection, rather than the overall educational provision that the school makes. During this inspection, the inspector evaluated the progress the school

has made in implementing recommendations made in an earlier inspection under the following headings:

- Progress achieved to date
- Findings
- Recommendations

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Teams: FTI (2018):

It is worth noting that the Follow Through Inspection that took place in 2018 had a different format again to the WSE-MLL, just as the WSE-MLL had a different format to the WSE.

The Main Recommendations and Demands of the Inspection Team:

The school was to finalise the School Self Evaluation (SSE) report and the School Improvement Plan (SIP), and integrate the various elements of the school plan.

The Changes Made to Implement and Enact the Demands:

The School Self Evaluation (SSE) report was duly finalised, with all reports in one document; so too with the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The various elements of the school plan were also integrated, as requested.

Impact of Inspectors' Recommendations and Subsequent Changes Made:

The inspectors' demands gave the school the impetus to complete the School Self Evaluation (SSE) report, and the School Improvement Plan (SIP), and to integrate both into a unified document. The benefits of integrating these two documents brought about improvements to the school. Time was allocated for separate groups to meet, with a view to integrating all school plans within a certain timeline. There were numerous staff teams working on different aspects

of SSE, and as all documentation was now integrated into one document (online), in accordance with the demand of the inspector. The school plan became the sole reference point for all staff discussion on school improvement.

Part 2: Old-Regime (prior to 01 September 2005) Qualitative Findings

4.24 Introduction

As discussed above, following the analysis of the inspection reports, the following three themes were generated: Teaching and Learning, Leadership and Management, and School Climate. These three themes were used as the basis of the interview questions administered as part of this study, and thus the qualitative findings from the interviews can be analysed under these three themes. This section presents the findings under these three themes from the interviews conducted about the Old Regime (up to WSE, 2005).

4.25 Theme 1: Teaching and Learning – Old-Regime Findings

Bullock (2015, p.21) makes it clear that teaching is multifaceted; she concludes from her findings that from a student's point of view, a good teacher is 'patient, helpful, kind, funny and positive'. Other older students rated caring, content-knowledge, safe environment, dependability, preparedness, and a good teacher-student relationship as important. A good teacher according to the students in this study, is thus not just an educator but someone who can connect with his/her students while also teaching.

The following sub-themes were significant under the heading Teaching and Learning and these were: Streaming and Academic Levels, Methodologies, and Behaviour in the Classroom.

4.26 Streaming and Levels – Old Regime

Prior to and including 2005, this school set out guidelines that stipulated that all in-coming first years would undertake an entrance examination, which was not a standardised test. Based on the results of this examination, the students were streamed. Streaming is the separating of students into classes based on their ‘intellectual’ or ‘academic ability’. The highest stream is A, the middle stream is B, and the lowest is C (if there were three classes in a year group). The students in the A stream usually sat higher-level papers, students in the B stream sat some higher but mostly ordinary-level papers, and those in the C stream sat ordinary and foundation-level papers. The students remained in these classes for the duration of the Junior Cycle – three years. This process was identified by Past Pupil L and Teacher L (also a past pupil) as a major stressor. Past Pupil L described the entrance examination as follows:

‘quite intimidating, my memories are of harshness and control on the part of the examiners’.

Teacher L recalls the entrance examination:

‘I just remember that I was so nervous, I think that was more because I knew that I was being streamed’.

Teacher L also remembers the first day of secondary school, when all of the first years were called to the assembly hall:

‘It was called out on that first day of secondary school, the A’s, B’s and the C’s. There was a huge amount of disappointment from some and humiliation as well’.

There was great pressure to maintain academic grades to stay in the A stream. Teacher L explained:

'you had to do well in your exams to stay in your class group ... you saw people moving down ... those people stopped caring and stopped working'.

The consequences of being in the lower or lowest stream were keenly felt by those who, on the basis of the entrance examination, were placed in the B or C streams, or indeed D or E. The impact is conveyed succinctly by Past Pupil L:

'I think, secretly, you want to be in the honours class (the highest stream or maybe second highest) but you're happy to be sort of in the middle row ... there's amazing power in being identified with a particular group ... so I was put into the ordinary group ... (pass level) well, I guess, I'm ordinary'.

Past Pupil L knew that he had a much higher ability; he arrived a couple of days before the commencement of the academic year and was placed in a lower stream. As an adult he went on to attain a Primary degree and a Masters degree. The impact for all students of being in the bottom streams was that subjects were all taken at ordinary level or even foundation level, which resulted in limited opportunities for students when they left school. Many went into the world of work, as they did not qualify, on the basis of their results, for entry into higher education. The Department of Education was not in favour of streaming at this time (2005), in line with the literature and best practice.

4.27 Methodologies – Old-Regime Findings

Methodologies encompass the various practices, styles, approaches, techniques and strategies employed by the teacher to teach their subject. In the findings regarding methodologies, Pupil L said:

L said:

'The methodology of teaching in most classrooms was, we had textbooks that were assigned, and ... we'd read a portion of that textbook, and then the teacher would stop and say any questions?'

Past Pupil L suggested that different methodologies were not used by many teachers to make the lessons interesting:

'I sensed that it felt like minimal, minimal effort in terms of pedagogy.'

This was at a time when the Department of Education, following the 1998 Education Act, offered extensive in-service to teachers in the use of different methodologies in the classroom to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers in this school did not have a tradition of attending in-service, nor indeed did senior management. On the very significant point on whether schooling in this school instilled a love of education, Past Pupil L conceded:

'So it didn't stir in me a desire for education, because it was all very uninteresting'.

Past Pupil L suggested that teachers should instil a love of learning in their students:

'finding a way to draw out from them their best potential ... I didn't feel like that was a thing I experienced during my time here'.

These findings do not concur with Hopkins and Harris (2013, p.2) that ‘the vision of the school should be one which embraces all members of the school community as both learners and contributors.’

4.28 Behaviour in the Classroom – Old-Regime Findings

Behaviour in the classroom affects teachers teaching and students learning. Shinn, Ramsey, Walker, Stieber, and O’Neill (1987) suggest that:

Classrooms with frequent disruptive behaviours have less academic engaged time, and the students in disruptive classrooms tend to have lower grades and do poorer on standardised tests.

During the course of the WSE (2005), it was obvious to the inspectors that discipline was not being enforced in the school. It was of serious concern to the inspectors that teaching and learning were suffering as a result. Past Pupil J, who attended the school prior to the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) of 2005 and also attended post 2005, considered teacher expectations up to 2005 as unacceptable:

‘Expectations were low. It felt like a rough school’.

Past Pupil L agreed:

‘I think there was a sort of surrender to average when it came to ordinary level students or even worse.’

The learning atmosphere was very different in the highest stream in comparison to the lower streams. Past Pupil L remembers his English teacher saying, after she read his work out loud to the class as an exemplar:

'I want you to pack your bags, and go down to the honours class, because you shouldn't be here'.

The past pupil did not move to the higher stream because he felt that he had missed too much learning and that it would be impossible to catch up. When he declined, there was no further effort made by the school to change his mind, or point out that he was missing an opportunity to reach his full potential. This is an important finding, as it meant that this student carried on in a class where his ability was not challenged.

Teacher M spoke of how difficult it was at that time for a teacher to have high expectations.

'It was impossible ... you couldn't cover the course...and they were so badly behaved'.

Indeed, Teacher M offered the opinion that a student having a work ethic was unacceptable to the majority of the student population:

'It was sort of frowned upon to be a worker'.

The past pupils highlighted the link between optimum teaching and learning and classroom management and behaviour. Past Pupil J noted that

'some teachers had control but others did not ... it was just going to be forty minutes of chaos and messing.'

In the findings, the students were aware that misbehaviour in class meant that little teaching took place. The findings suggest that students considered that good teachers had control and

that they got on with the job of teaching and learning efficiently. Past-Pupil L remembered classes where there was no control, with teachers allowing students

'permission to be a little giddy, permission to sit on the table, and not have to sit in the chair, permission to kind of lounge around and joke together'.

Teacher M highlighted the impact that attendance and punctuality had on behaviour in the classroom under the Old Regime, emphasising that the lateness was not just when students were to the first class in the morning, but every class:

'A very big problem with students coming late into every class, it could be five students coming in late into classes'.

Punctuality and lateness coming to class is indicative of poor discipline. Consequently, learning was compromised. Indeed, poor discipline in a school prevents learning, and this school was no exception. Teacher L as a past pupil remembers the poor behaviour of some students:

'I remember the fire alarm going off ... it was a regular occurrence'.

This finding is indicative of very poor discipline in a school. Teacher L also remembers that as a student, classroom management of poor behaviour amounted to students being sent to the principal's office. The findings that this was a regular occurrence indicated the discipline system had broken down:

'when there was disruption ... they were down in the office ... which was a pretty crowded place'.

These findings concur with the literature about the effect of poor behaviour on educational attainment. Attempts to control disruptive behaviours in a classroom cost considerable teacher

time, at the expense of academic instruction. The findings concur with this assertion. Teachers who have major problems with behaviour management and classroom discipline often report high levels of stress and symptoms of burnout, and are frequently ineffective (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000; Espin and Yell, 1994). The findings on discipline and behaviour in this school in the WSE (2005) do concur with this view. The findings pertaining to the ‘Old Regime’ do not concur with Bear et al.’s (2005) view that disciplined behaviour is moderated by the development needs of students. It can involve important issues such as of student-school fit, bonding to school, academic demands. Discipline in this school did not concur with this definition as according to the WSE report (2005).

4.29 Theme 2: Leadership and Management – Old-Regime Findings

According to the Irish Inspectorate, ‘the primary purpose of school leadership and management is to create and sustain an environment that underpins high quality in student care, learning and teaching’ (Circular letter 003/2018, Department of Education).

The sub-theme under the heading of Leadership and Management is Discipline.

4.30 Discipline – Old-Regime Findings

In terms of the discipline structure that existed at the time (WSE 2005), Past Pupil L drew attention to the structure being not fit for purpose:

‘And so it wasn’t a successful mode of discipline ... it was sort of, out of sight, out of mind, go home. So it didn’t really work’.

Past Pupil J remarked:

‘I thought at the time that nothing was going to change’.

It may well have been the case that management and staff were overwhelmed by the indiscipline in the school at that time. In order to establish order and good behaviour, it is necessary for senior management to lead staff in maintaining a highly visible presence throughout the school. It would seem that there was no such presence in this school, according to the students. The opinion of a negative school culture being wearing is conveyed by Past Pupil L:

'I can imagine being constantly bombarded with that culture could really wear one's patience and one's endurance down'.

This finding suggested that senior management was worn down by the constant examples each day of the breakdown of discipline in the school. Good behaviour must be at the centre of all learning in a school; indeed, according to Bechuke and Debeila (2012, p.242), 'school discipline can be described as all activities that are implemented to control learner behaviour to enforce compliance and maintain order'. Skiba and Peterson's study (1999, p. 9) found that 'in any institution, the preservation of order demands that boundaries be set and enforced ... in the same way, schools and classrooms in which aggressive, dangerous or seriously disruptive behaviours are tolerated will almost inevitably descend into chaos'. Skiba and Peterson (2012) further opine that the higher the level of discipline in a school, the greater the academic performance of the students, and that schools can influence the level of discipline that exists in the classroom.

After the publication of the WSE (2005), discipline had to be restored in this school as soon as possible to effect change in academic outcomes and also to maintain order. Those with

responsibility for maintaining order needed to act immediately. In truth, all staff needed to be responsible for students' adherence to the Code of Behaviour; this involved a change of culture.

Emotional support for teachers is crucial in sustaining an environment for teaching and learning in a school. A good discipline system is necessary to support quality teaching and learning; these supports are the function and responsibility of a senior management team. Teacher M recalls:

'It was just hard to get that support that you needed ... The fire alarm was set off nearly every day and sometimes twice a day, nothing happened, no action taken'.

Parent B also remarked that the school's reputation went downhill up to and including the time of the WSE (2005):

'The reputation of the school was that discipline was poor'.

Parent A concurred with this assessment:

'No, it didn't have a great reputation, to put it mildly'.

Providing teaching resources in any school is a priority to give the students the opportunity to do well in their learning activities. However, the availability of teacher resources was found to be wanting, according to Teacher M. A school cannot function without relevant resources.

According to Teacher M:

'Resources were not high on the agenda up to May 2005'.

Ancillary Staff 2 focussed on leadership and management skills:

'I believe the principal should know if teachers are arriving in school on time ... it was very easy for a teacher to arrive late and them not being noticed'.

Up to and including the time of the WSE (2005), Ancillary Staff 2 found the year-head system lacking:

'A lot of people were year-heads, I found the control they had on the kids was lacking ... they would just turn their heads'.

Those with responsibility for running the school such as principal, deputy-principal or post-holders cannot stand idly by. Indeed, all teachers should be involved in establishing good behaviour; however, the principal has the ultimate responsibility for the quality of education offered to all students in the school. Principals play a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools. Successful schools are positive and productive workplaces for teachers and vibrant learning environments for children (Davis et al., 2005). Successful principals enable staff to do their jobs effectively; they offer intellectual support to teachers to improve their teaching. No underperforming school can hope to effect change without supporting the teaching staff, both in the realm of emotional and professional support but also by providing resources for teaching and learning. There is a financial cost to the school to provide resources; however, without them, teachers cannot properly fulfil their professional responsibilities.

According to Chen and Weikart (2008), school disorder and student academic achievement are correlated theoretically. A safe school according to them is a place where students can concentrate on their studies; conversely, fear and avoidance can have a very negative impact on student outcomes. This was clearly the case in this school, where vandalism caused great distress and fear to students and staff; for example, breaking the glass of the fire alarm or

smoking in the toilets caused the fire alarm to go off on a very regular basis, thus disrupting class time. Vandalism in this school, as Cooze (1995) indicated, had social as well as monetary costs to the school. This was evident in the decision of the insurance company to no longer willing to replace broken windows. In addition, members in the community became aware through word of mouth that vandalism and poor behaviour were commonplace in the school.

Teacher M remembered many examples of vandalism that were prevalent at the time. One example was the impact that the behaviour of the students had on the school building, for example the toilets:

'The main area of total indiscipline was the toilets...if you went in, you could get "why are you in here, Miss, you shouldn't be here".'

In addition, Teacher M asserted that

'there was smoking going on in all toilets. And graffiti all over the walls'.

The school building was deemed to be somewhat neglected. Past- Pupil J indicated:

'It was definitely uninviting, the upkeep of the school building, the grounds were not good, to say the least'.

Similarly, Past Pupil L offered this opinion:

'I definitely avoided the toilets ... they were just like a war zone ... it didn't feel like a valued space. It felt like a decrepit, decaying space'.

Ancillary Staff 2 concurred with this assessment. He stated that

'I suppose about ninety percent of my time was taken up by fixing broken stuff, due to vandalism'.

There was widespread vandalism reported by Ancillary Staff 2:

'Windows broken, toilets wrecked, I'd say there was a constant vandalism... wild... a bit like the wild west... over one Christmas, there were sixteen or seventeen large windows broken'.

It was reported that the fire alarm was constantly going off because of fires being set off in the toilets. Ancillary Staff 2 reported:

'a kid lights up a cigarette and he has a lighter in his hand and suddenly he is burning the door, suddenly, he is burning the ceiling tiles, suddenly he is burning the toilet paper ... the fire alarm would go off and all the kids would have to leave the building ... they would have said in the community, for many years, I wouldn't send my children to that school'.

Ancillary Staff 3 spoke about the condition of the building in general:

'You would have to scrub the walls, you would have fruit on them, you would have ink, writing or whatever, you were scrubbing and scrubbing constantly'.

As a result of poor behaviour and vandalism taking place in the school frequently, the fabric of the school was in bad condition, both inside and outside. This did not help the reputation of the school, and the decrease in student numbers was perhaps not surprising. The consequences of poor behaviour and vandalism caused educational damage and social damage to the students,

as the school was viewed as a rundown school with no reputation for providing a quality education.

4.31 Theme 3: School Climate – Old-Regime Findings

Darling-Hammond and DePaoli (2020, p. 7) define a positive school climate as:

A positive school climate – where students feel a sense of safety and belonging and where relational trust prevails – improves academic achievement, test scores, grades, and engagement and helps reduce the negative effects of poverty on academic achievement.

The sub-theme under the heading of School Climate is Student/Teacher Relationships.

4.32 Student/Teacher Relationships – Old-Regime Findings

There were concerns expressed about the school climate in the WSE (2005). Past Pupil L felt that the school climate affected the students on a large scale:

‘Yeah, I think the climate was rule by fear, I think, and so it was sort of the old classic authoritative model’.

Although this student did also appreciate that some teachers were different:

‘There were other teachers that were that were a little bit more intuitive, and caring. They were in the minority’.

Past Pupil L described the climate in the school in the following terms:

‘Intimidation would be a word I think I would use to describe that ... the student/teacher distinction was so stark’.

Teacher M described the teaching-and-learning environment from the point of view of both teachers and students, citing a lack of respect as a key missing ingredient at that time in the school. This lack of respect affected school climate greatly:

'I do remember it being a difficult teaching environment ... I mean, there wasn't respect for the teacher... teachers were exhausted, and it was like a battle zone'.

These findings do indicate that the climate in the school left a lot to be desired. The fundamental ingredients of respect, manners and thoughtfulness seem to have been missing. These findings represent the state of play in the school, up to and including the WSE report of 2005.

Part 3: New-Regime (1 September 2005 to 31 August 2021) Findings:

Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

4.33 Introduction

The findings of the New Regime are presented as a mixed-method approach; thus the quantitative and qualitative findings are presented together, as outlined below. All of the findings below pertain to the New Regime (1st September 2005 to 31st August 2021). Following analysis of the quantitative and qualitative phase of the study of the New Regime, the following themes were prevalent: Teaching and Learning; Leadership and Management; School Climate.

Number of Surveys	N = 931
Students = 570	
Parents = 330	
Teachers = 31	

Number of Interviews	N = 19
Students = 4	
Past-Pupils = 4	
Parents = 2	
Deputy-principal = 1	
Former Inspectors = 2	
Ancillary Staff = 3	
Teachers = 3	

4.34 Theme 1: Teaching and Learning Findings – New Regime (September 2005- August 2021)

Following the robust recommendations of the WSE report (2005), the principal, along with members of staff, established a strong school-improvement agenda in the school. There were explicit and school-wide targets for improvement set and communicated with accompanying timelines over many years. The core objective was to improve teaching and learning outcomes for all students in the school. The purpose of the questions on teaching and learning in both the surveys and interviews was to establish if there had been improvements in teaching and learning outcomes in the school.

The sub-themes under the headings of the theme of Teaching and Learning are Behaviour in the Classroom; Quality of Teaching; Teacher Feedback.

4.35 Behaviour in the Classroom – New Regime

In the WSE (2005) report, behaviour was deemed to be unacceptable. Poor behaviour was noted (not only by the inspectors but also students, teachers and parents) to be of major concern as it disrupted teaching and learning in the classroom. Thus, to analyse the behaviour in the classroom in the New Regime, students were asked in the questionnaire whether the behaviour of other students in their class was good. Altogether 81.1% of students said that the behaviour of other students in their class is good either all of the time or most of the time (see Figure 2 below).

The behaviour of other students in my class is good		
	N	%
All of the time	98	17.2%

Most of the time	364	63.9%
Some of the time	93	16.3%
Almost never	12	2.1%
Never	3	0.5%

Figure 2(a)

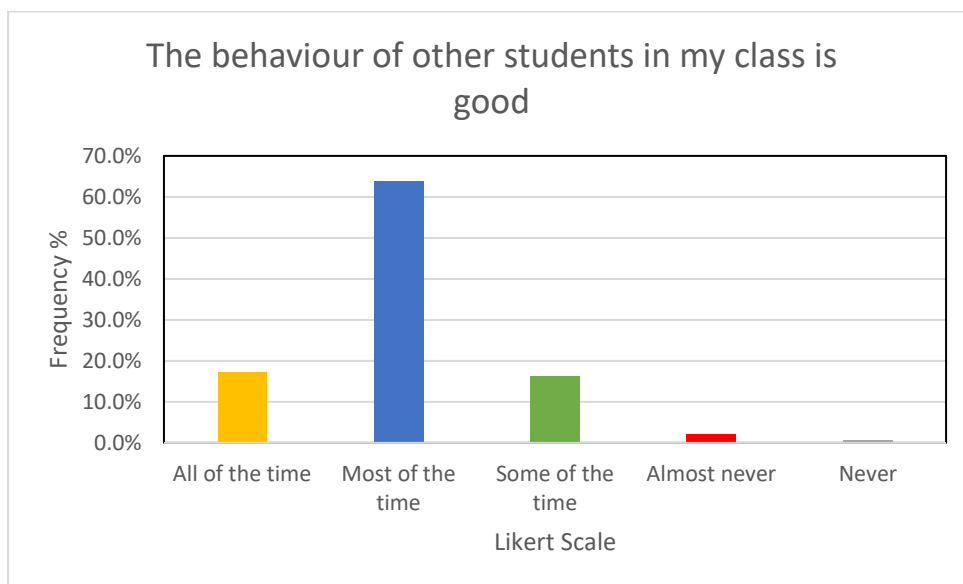


Figure 2(b)

The interview findings also back this opinion up with Student J, who experienced both the Old Regime and New Regime, stating:

‘The poor behaviour was not tolerated, nor was the shouting and roaring [...] If you were going in for 40 minutes of (X Subject named), you were going to be taught’.

The behaviour of students is generally good in this school		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	21	67.7%
Agree	9	29.0%
Neutral	1	3.2%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

Figure 3(a)

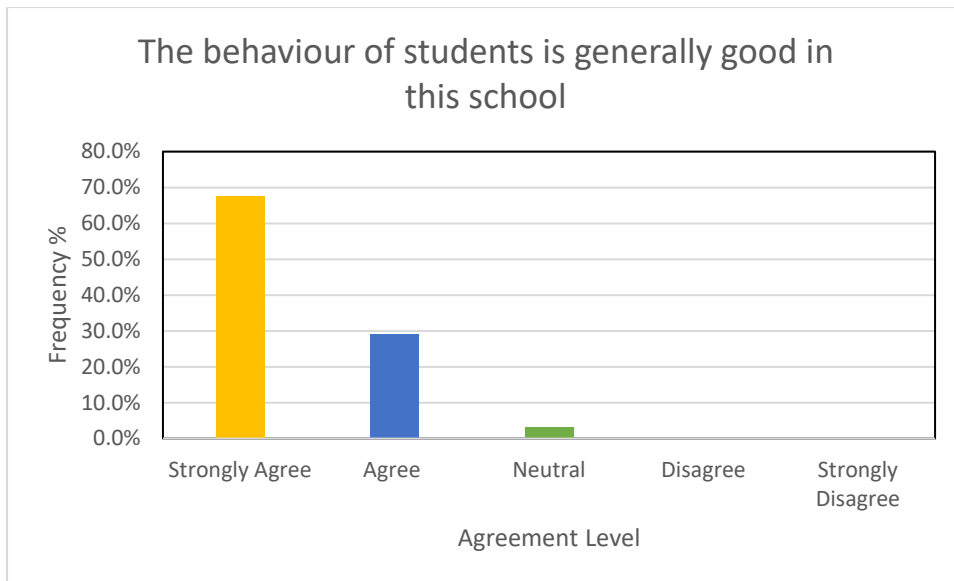


Figure 3(b)

96.7% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that the behaviour of students is generally good in this school (see Figure 3 above). Teacher L, speaking about discipline, adds

'I have no discipline issues and even the odd issue, it's a discussion that I might just ask someone to step outside the door, and I have a chat about it. And I will let them know why the behaviour isn't acceptable. It is done in a calm way, raising of voices is not allowed in our school from anyone. We have a conversation with the student and the student listens to you. And so I think there's mutual respect here'.

Discipline is enforced through the Code of Behaviour, and it is necessary that this is implemented consistently and fairly in this school.

The Code of Behaviour is implemented consistently by teaching staff in this school.		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	8	25.8%
Agree	19	61.3%
Neutral	3	9.7%
Disagree	1	3.2%

Figure 4(a)

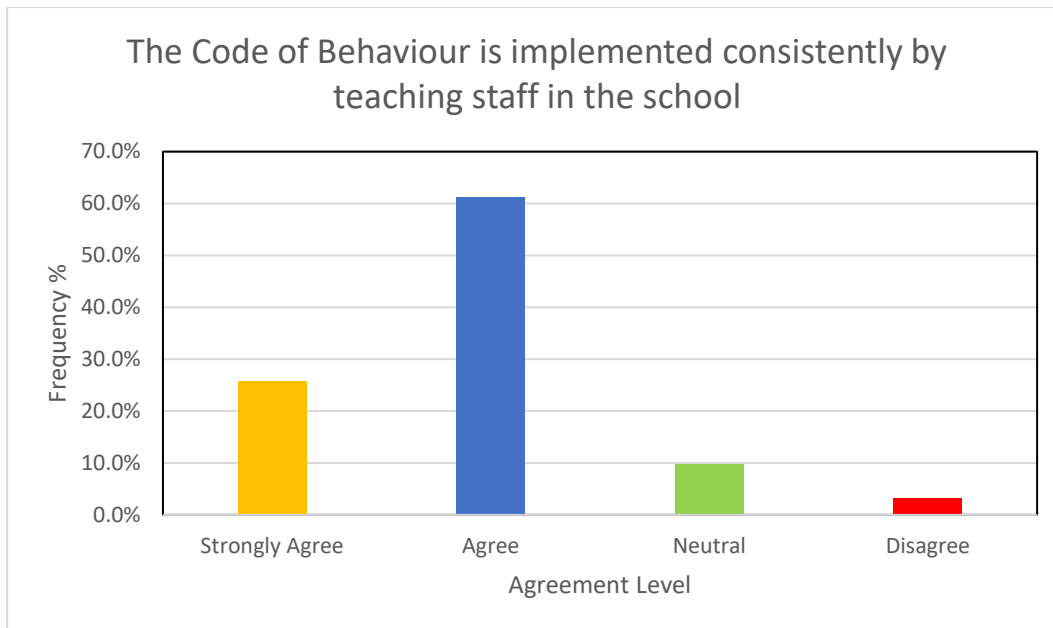


Figure 4(b)

Altogether 87.1% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that the Code of Behaviour is implemented consistently in this school (see Figure 4 above).

Discipline is good in this school		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	154	46.7%
Agree	117	35.5%
Neutral	17	5.2%
Disagree	2	0.6%
Strongly Disagree	40	12.1%

Figure 5(a)

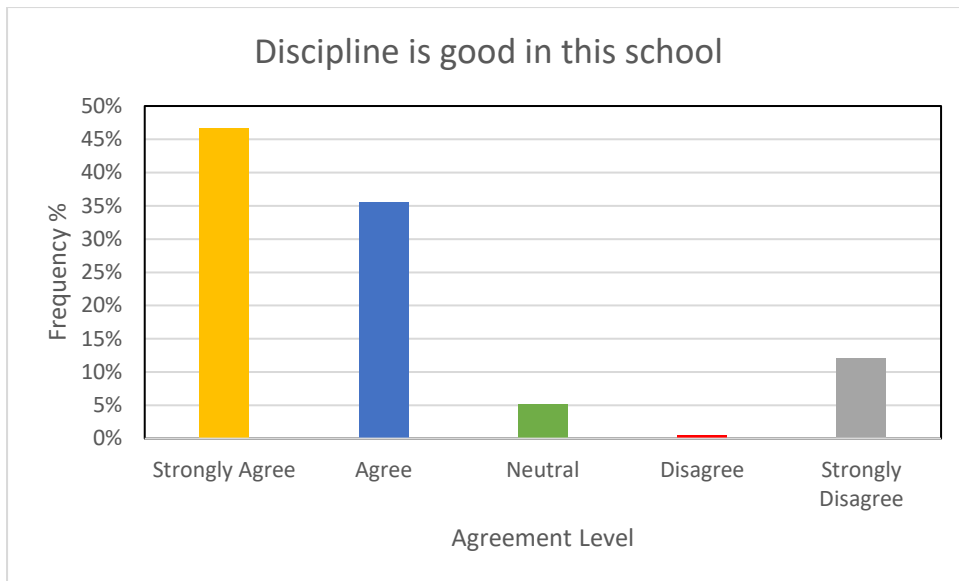


Figure 5(b)

Altogether 82.2% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that discipline is good in this school (see Figure 5 above).

4.36 Quality of Teaching Findings – New Regime

The quality of teaching was uneven in the subjects inspected in 2005, and the WSE (2005) report noted how important it was for teachers in the school to engage in peer collaboration to establish new teaching methodologies, so as to improve teaching in the school. To assess the quality of teaching in the school post-2005, all students were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed that teaching is good in this school.

Teaching is good in this school (Students' Responses)		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	130	22.8%
Agree	354	62.1%
Neutral	71	12.5%
Disagree	15	2.6%

Figure 6(a)

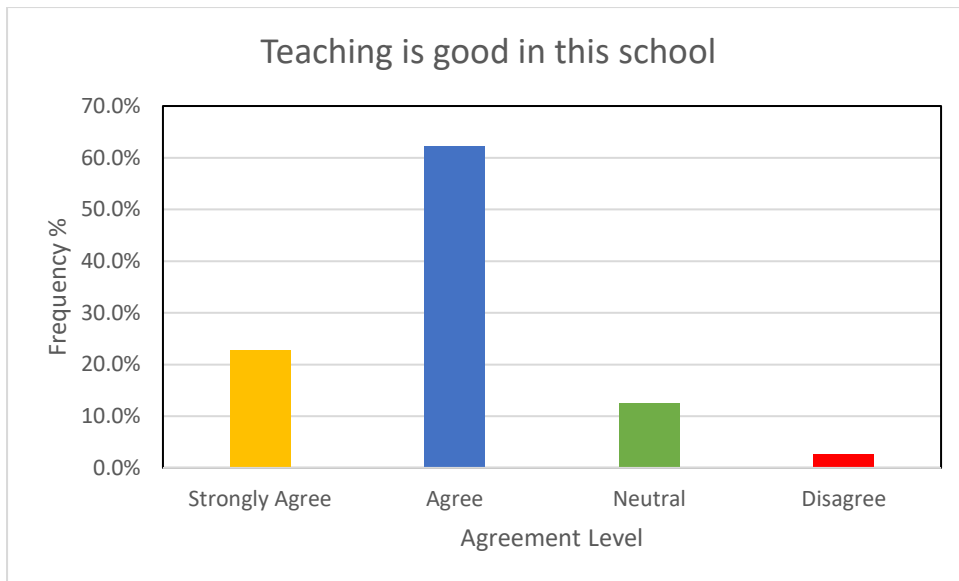


Figure 6(b)

Altogether 84.9% of students strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘teaching is good in this school’ (see Figure 6 above). Many parents concurred with this viewpoint.

Teaching is good in the school (Parents’ responses)		
	N	%
Strongly agree	110	33.3%
Agree	185	56.1%
Neutral	26	7.9%
Disagree	3	0.9%
Strongly disagree	6	1.8%

Figure 7(a)

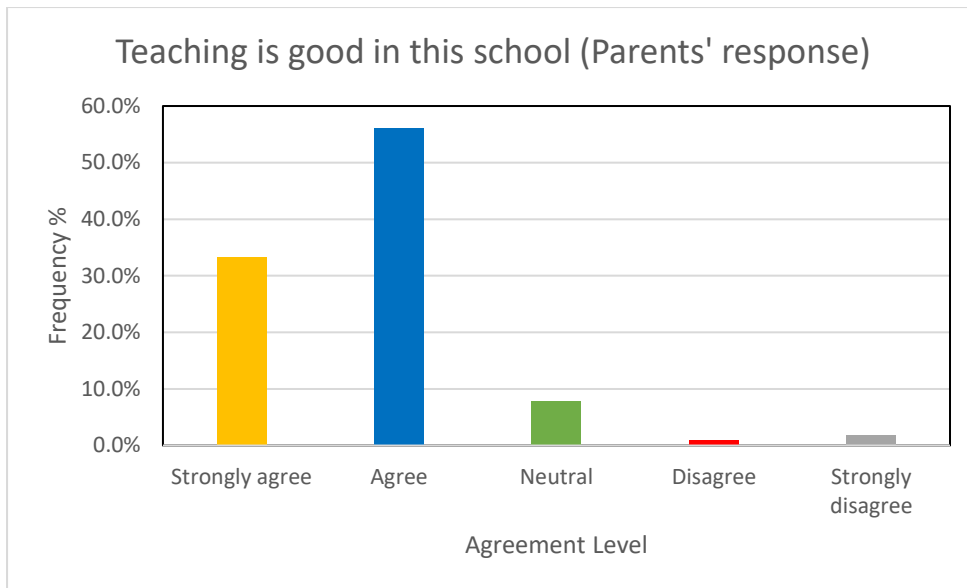


Figure 7(b)

Altogether 89.4% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that ‘teaching is good in this school’ (see Figure 7 above). Students were also asked whether the teachers in the school encourage them to perform to the best of their ability. In WSE (2005), the inspectors noted significant underachievement in the school. Students at that time were not encouraged to sit honours level papers in State examinations.

The teachers in this school encourage me to perform to the best of my ability		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	148	26.0%
Agree	316	55.4%
Neutral	90	15.8%
Disagree	14	2.5%
Strongly Disagree	2	0.3%

Figure 8(a)

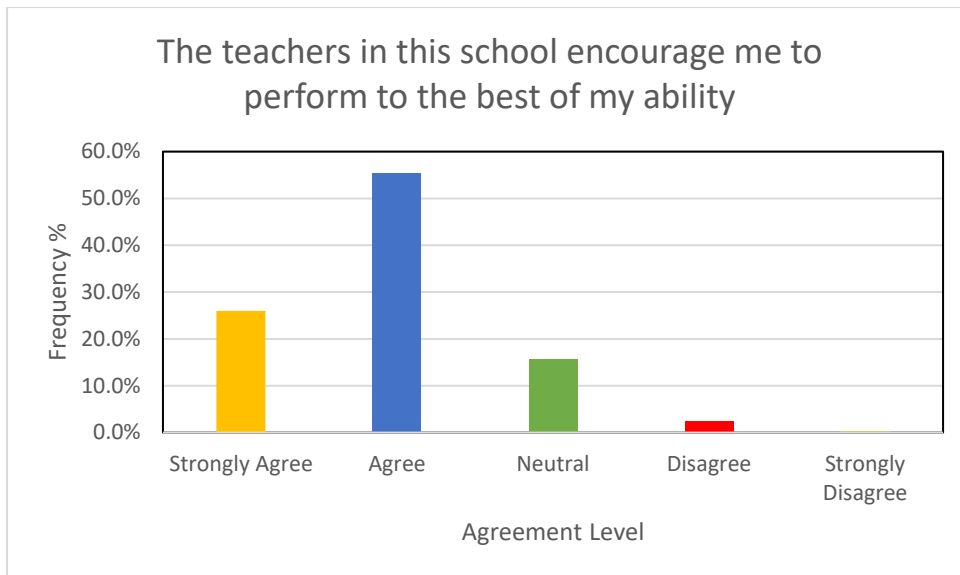


Figure 8(b)

81.4% of the students surveyed in the school strongly agreed or agreed that: ‘the teachers in this school encourage me to perform to the best of my ability’ (see Figure 8 above). The findings above from the questionnaires on the quality of teaching correlate with the findings from the interviews. All of the current school students who were interviewed discussed the high standard of teaching, and pointed out that the teachers used instructional-leadership techniques and other exemplary practices to achieve positive outcomes for the students. Student A stated that

‘The level of teaching is very good because of the diversity of teaching styles’.

Past Pupil R commented on the standard of teaching in the school:

‘I think that the standard of teaching was very high. I think across the board like every subject that we did, and every year, the teachers have been very good. We always got regular homework, you know, it would be checked, the classrooms were well-managed and stuff, and I think the teachers looked out for the students as well.’

In addition, Student F referred to the benefits of using Bloom's Taxonomy, a teaching strategy in instructional leadership:

'I feel Bloom's Taxonomy should be used in all subjects, if not, teachers are not using a really good teaching method' (referring to the fact that not all teachers use it).

Student L liked the focus on examination technique in the school:

'The teachers' focus is on exams, and the exam preparation by teachers is always great'.

Student B also appreciates that teachers in the school do not adhere to learning by rote to pass examinations:

'The teachers like the students to understand the material rather than just focusing on learning it off'.

Past Pupil R stated, on academic expectations in the school:

'There was always like an emphasis to do your best, but like not any ridiculous amount of pressure to get a H1 (Honours- highest level) in a subject that maybe someone wasn't able for. It was good pressure, it was helpful, it was constructive but it wasn't stressful'.

In sum, the findings support the hypothesis that the quality of teaching had greatly improved.

3.37 Teacher Feedback Findings – New Regime

Based on all three inspection reports, it was clear that the school needed to focus urgently on feedback as part of their school-improvement strategy. Feedback was envisaged to be best

practice not only from teachers to students but also feedback to the parents. Teacher T also pointed out the importance of feedback when she said:

'feedback is so important for the students. It makes you very accountable as a teacher as well, which I do enjoy, because by giving good feedback, you are saying to the student, you are here now, but this is how to jump to the next level'.

This teacher also pointed out how the students saw feedback as an important part of their learning process:

'The students here are so ambitious. I suppose even always asking for feedback. And so I'd always write feedback, say on essays. And if they don't understand something, they'll come up and be like, 'what do you mean by this? I don't understand what you mean.'

To analyse the extent and quality of feedback from teachers to students in the school, students were asked whether teachers talk to them about ways to improve their learning.

The teachers talk to me about how I can improve my learning		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	64	11.2%
Agree	239	41.9%
Neutral	180	31.6%
Disagree	72	12.6%
Strongly Disagree	15	2.6%

Figure 9(a)

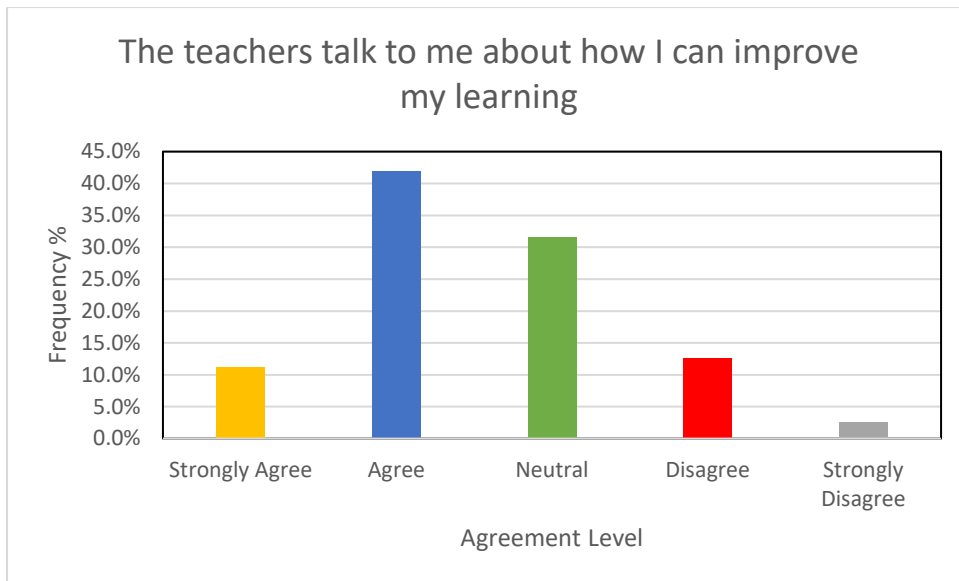


Figure 9(b)

Altogether 53.1% strongly agreed or agreed that teachers talk to them about ways to improve their learning. (See Figure 9 above). The high quality of feedback from teachers to students was also discussed in the interviews. Student B says:

'It would probably depend again on the class but I think for Junior Cert (the first State examination at age 15) they would have taken up the copies and corrected them maybe once a week, they would have given you a bit of feedback. Like you need to improve on a certain area, the feedback is much more extensive in senior cycle, we are expected to learn from each comment and improve.'

Student D also noted the high quality of feedback from teachers:

'And then for English, we actually got voice feedback, which I found really helpful. And it was like for long essays and stuff we'd get like, my teacher would give me, it could be like 10 minute long voice feedback, and you know, in real depth with everything in it, and it really helped me understand and apply that feedback to my next essay.'

Student L explains both written and oral feedback:

'They give a grade for the paper, they explain why they gave that grade ... So along the margins of the copy, I get notes alongside saying, this is a good point, this is a bad point, maybe you should not do this, but you should do that. Then at the end, a long enough note, telling me what I can improve and what was good about it, what was bad about it, and an explanation for the grade that I got. On top of that, I can always ask the teacher, and she's very open to elaborating or explaining why she said what she said. Throughout the online teaching (during Covid pandemic), or actually, after the online teaching as well. She would often after grading a paper, record a voice note and send it to you over google classroom so that you can listen to it and keep it on there. And it's just the exact same thing, just probably articulated better, rather than writing because you can hear the intonation in her voice, essentially explaining why you got that grade'.

Survey findings reveal teachers' views on feedback for students:

I give effective feedback to my students on how they can improve.		
	N	%
Always	17	54.8%
Most of the time	11	35.5%
Some of the time	2	6.5%
Rarely	1	3.2%

Figure 10(a)

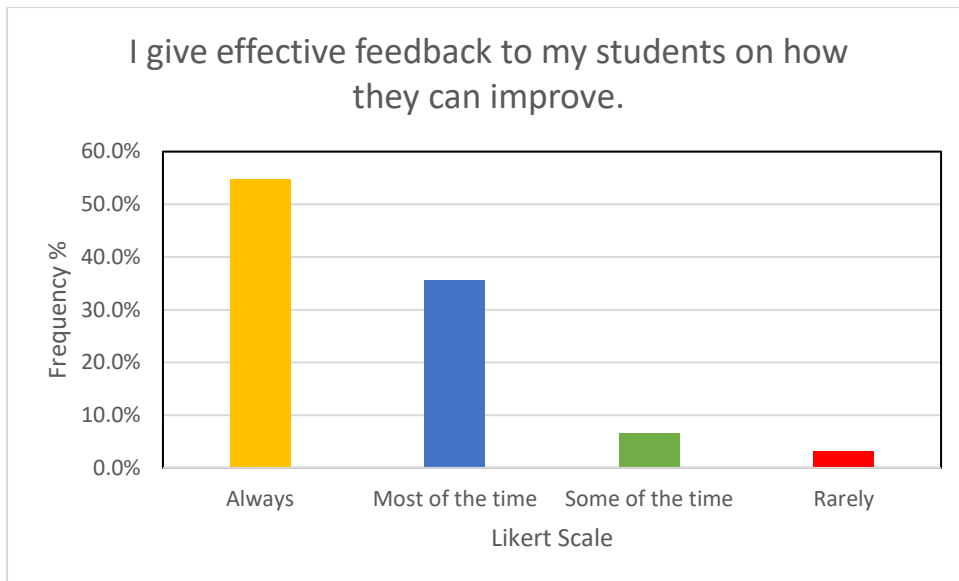


Figure 10(b)

The vast majority (90.3%) of teachers strongly agree or agree that they give effective feedback to their students (see Figure 10 above). Teachers welcome feedback from their students.

My students are welcome to give me feedback on my teaching.		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	11	35.5%
Agree	11	35.5%
Neutral	9	29.0%

Figure 11(a)

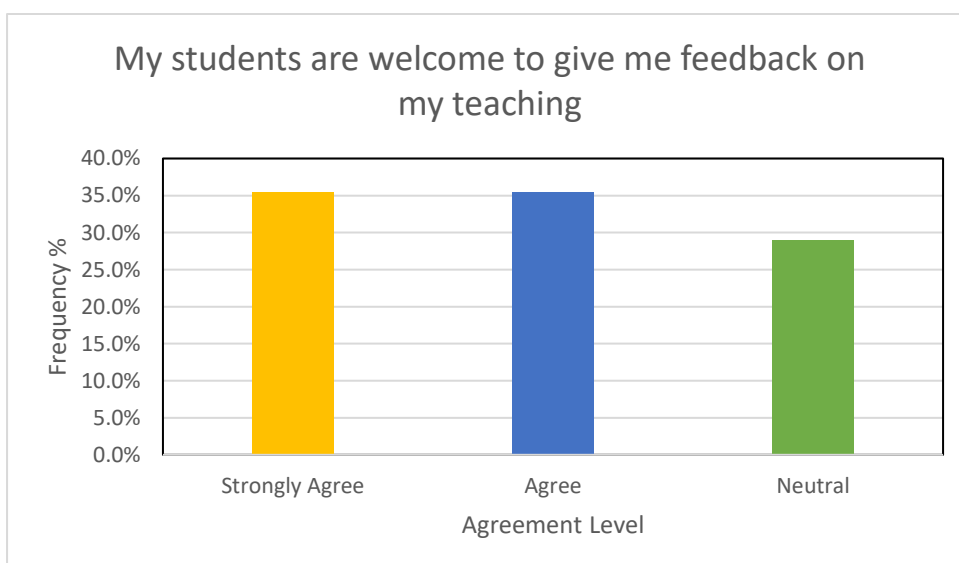


Figure 11(b)

71% of teachers state that they strongly agree or agree with the statement that ‘My students are welcome to give me feedback on my teaching’ (see Figure 11 above). One of the main ways to improve how feedback was given to parents was to improve parent-teacher meetings.

I am satisfied with the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings		
	N	%
Strongly agree	71	21.5%
Agree	148	44.8%
Neutral	75	22.7%
Disagree	27	8.2%
Strongly disagree	9	2.7%

Figure 12(a)

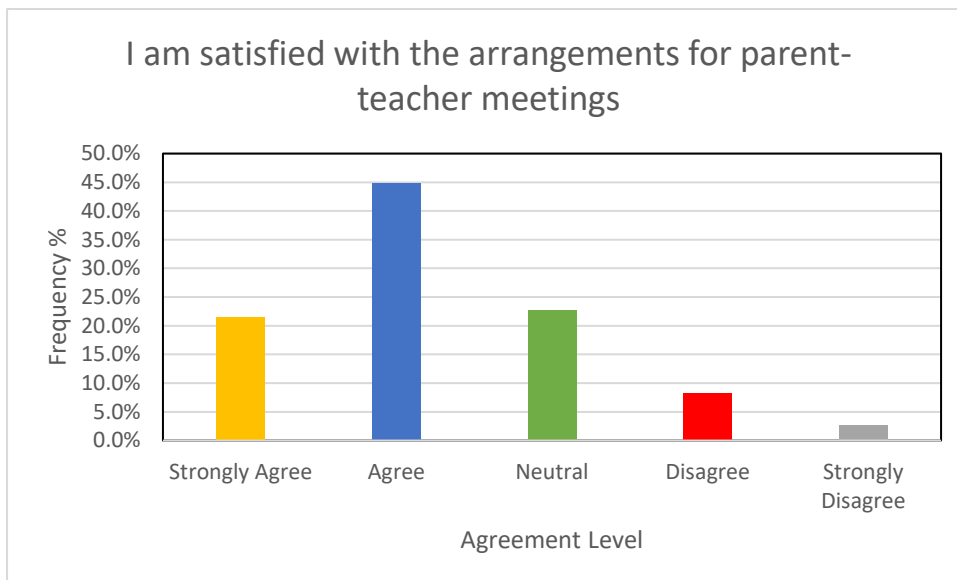


Figure 12(b)

66.3% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that they are satisfied with the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings (see Figure 12 above). Parent-teacher meetings are seen as a crucial link between the home and the school.

Parents are given good quality information by teachers on their child's progress at parent-teacher meetings.		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	14	45.2%
Agree	14	45.2%
Neutral	3	9.7%

Figure 13(a)

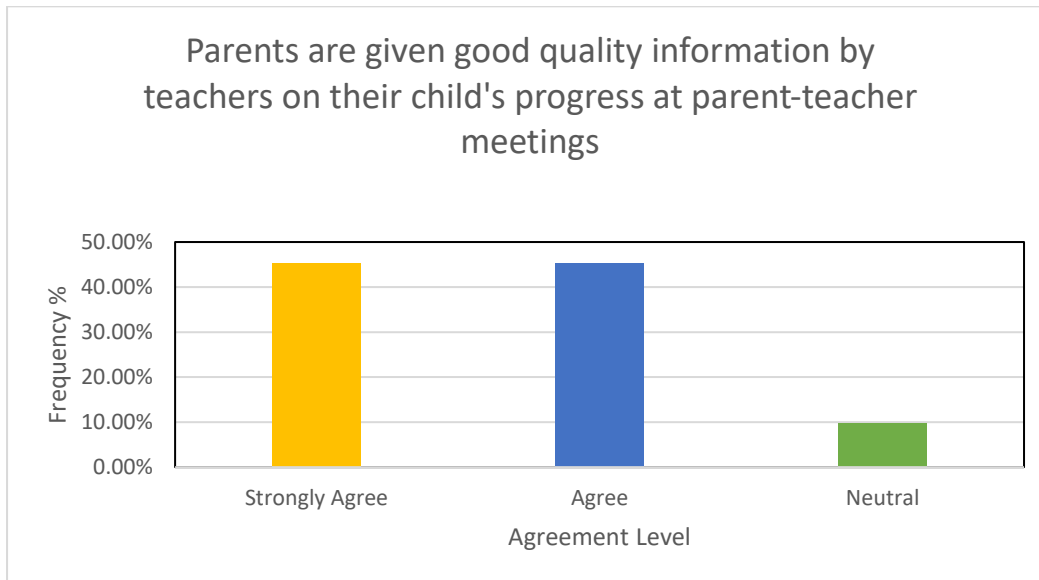


Figure 13(b)

Altogether, 90.4% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that parents are given good-quality information by teachers on their child's progress at parent-teacher meetings (see Figure 13 above). The quality of school reports is often an important part of feedback from teachers to students.

School reports give me a good picture of how my child is doing		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	154	46.7%
Agree	146	44.2%
Neutral	19	5.8%
Disagree	2	0.6%
Strongly Disagree	9	2.7%

Figure 14(a)

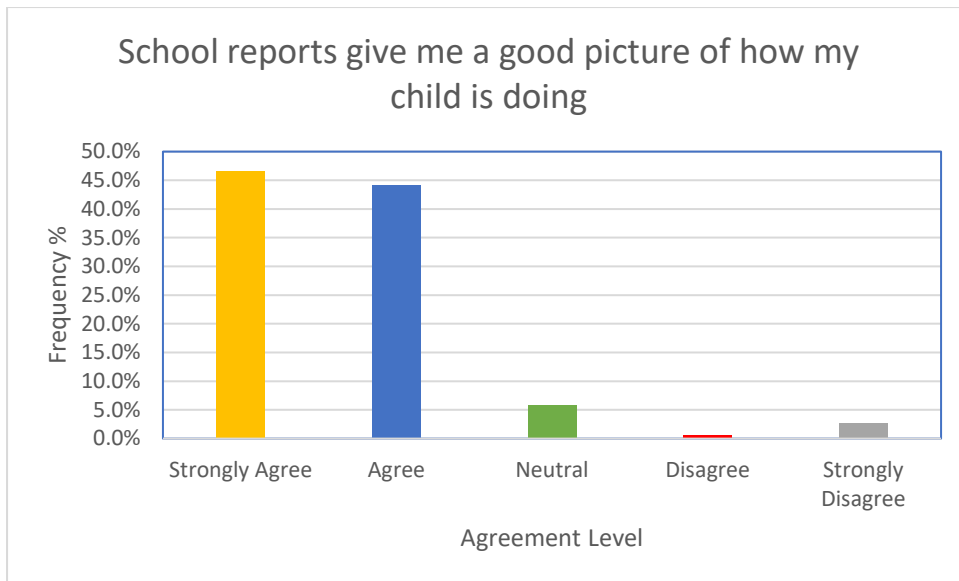


Figure 14(b)

When parents were asked whether school reports give them a good picture of how their child is doing, 90.9% strongly agreed or agreed (see Figure 16 above). Although the level of satisfaction regarding feedback was very high according to the parents, the level of satisfaction of students was average in the survey, but very positive in the interviews.

4.38 Theme 2: Leadership and Management – New-Regime Findings

According to the Inspectorate, effective principals exercise a key role in school cultures and performance. They also hold and communicate clearly their mission and vision for the school, in conjunction with the board of management, which is shared by all stakeholders. They empower staff by promoting a climate of collaboration in their schools. They apply high standards to themselves and others, and they also have a strategic plan for the present and for the future.

The WSE report (2005) found that in the realm of leadership and management that work needed to be accomplished to improve the learning environment for students. The following sub-themes were found in the quantitative and qualitative analysis:

1. Quality of Senior Management
2. Support from Senior Management
3. Evening and Weekend Study
4. School Building & Facilities
5. Quality of Curriculum Provision
6. Changes in Behaviour and the Principal's Leadership Style
7. Improved Systems and Structures in the New Regime

4.39 Quality of Senior Management – New Regime

Senior management in a school consist of the principal and deputy-principal. The deputy-principal is largely responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, while the principal is responsible for the mission and vision of the school, the staff and the organisation of the school. The major role and function of senior management is to ensure that all of the students in the school enjoy a quality educational experience; this includes ensuring that teaching and learning provision and standards are in line with current educational curricula and national levels of achievement. The well-being of students and staff is paramount. In order to provide the students with a quality education, staff need to be provided with up-to-date continuous professional development (CPD), which enables the staff to carry out their roles and responsibilities, while providing career development and opportunity. Without a quality senior management team, it is unlikely that the school will prosper.

In order to get a well-rounded view and overall sense on the quality of senior management in the school post-2005 (i.e. in the New Regime), students and parents were both asked in the survey to state to what extent they agreed with the statement: 'The School is Well-Run'. The

findings of this question can be seen below. Former Inspector 1 stated, on leadership and management:

In relation to Leadership and Management, leaders do the right things right, and managers do things right, but they need not be the right things.... the days of the principal being solely responsible are long gone and if they are not long gone, that school is not doing well I would certainly have come to the conclusion during my time with the inspectorate and with my own academic background and experience that leadership is where it is at, and that leadership is really about being proactive in a realistic way, that is, that you know the school, and you know the buttons that you can press and cannot press.

On what constitutes good leadership, Former Inspector 1 suggests that

It is really a dynamic, that goes on in the school, where the principal brings to the school, their vision, their competencies, and their ability. But it is in the context of the school and where it is at, the effective leader moves the school forward at the school's pace.

This school is well-run (Parents' Responses)		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	208	63.0%
Agree	103	31.2%
Neutral	13	3.9%
Disagree	3	0.9%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.9%

Figure 15(a)

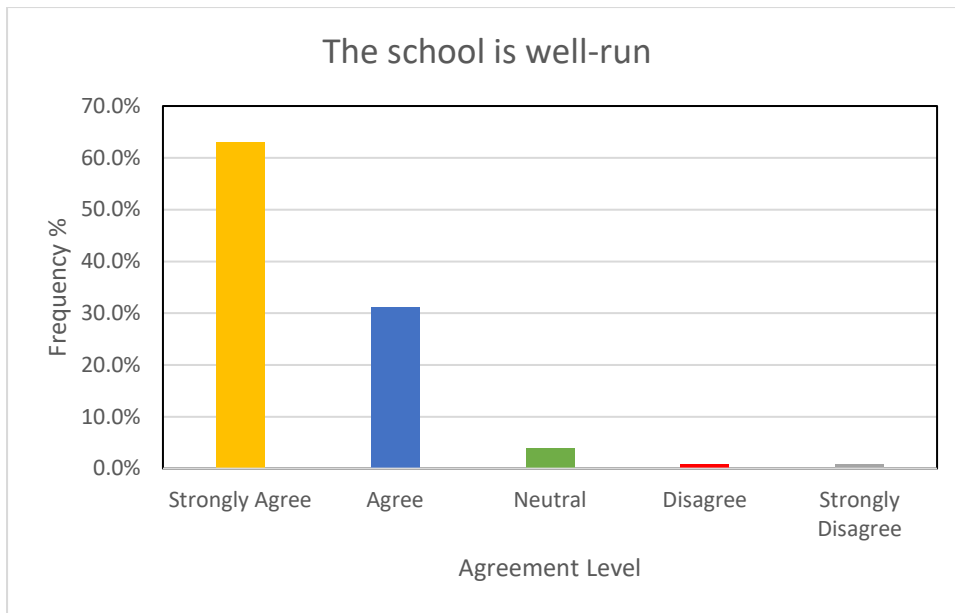


Figure 15(b)

A total of 94.2% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that the school is well-run (see Figure 15 above). Students concurred with this view.

My school is well-run (Students' Responses)		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	221	38.8%
Agree	281	49.3%
Neutral	54	9.5%
Disagree	10	1.8%
Strongly Disagree	4	0.7%

Figure 16(a)

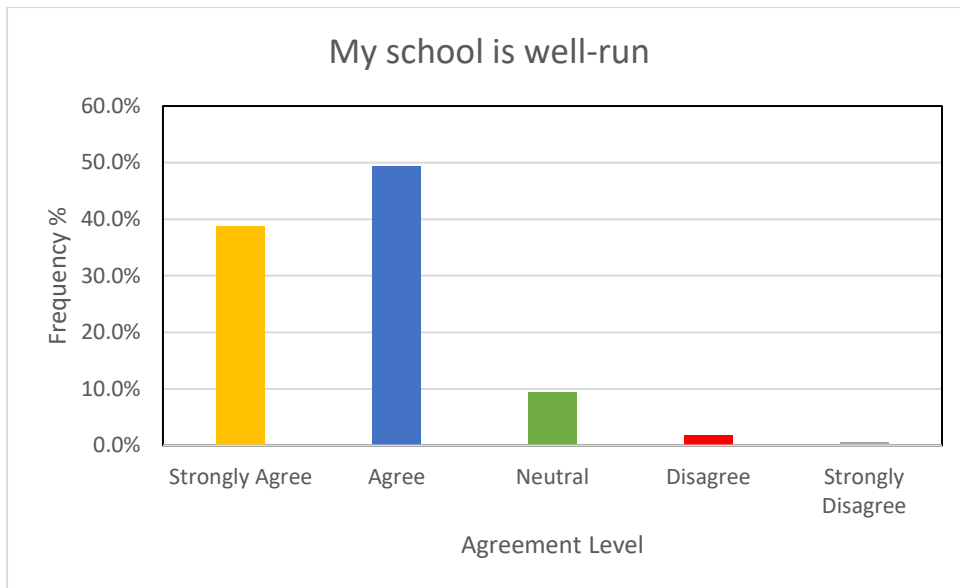


Figure 16(b)

Altogether 88.1% of students strongly agreed or agreed that the school is well-run (see Figure 16 above). The parents in the school spoke about the importance of senior school management being role models for the students, communicating moral values and modelling a good work ethic for the students. According to Parent A:

‘You’re giving over your children, seven hours a day ... hoping they will leave the school with the same moral values, a good work ethic, that was mirrored in the management of the school. Senior Management couldn’t have been more supportive’.

Both past pupils and current students commented that senior management worked as a team, and were seen around the school and aware of what is going on in the school for the benefit of all students. Past Pupil A stated:

‘They worked well together ... they were enthusiastic, and they had very good skills ... They definitely cared about the students ... the principal knew everything that was going on, in a nice way’.

Student C talks about the importance of efficiency in terms of the leadership and management of a school by the senior management team:

'I think the principal and deputy principal definitely work well together. I think there is an efficiency within, getting things done and hitting goals and targets for the school, and setting agendas and things. But I also think the interaction with the students is very good'.

4.40 Support from Senior Management: A) Students', B) Parents', and C) Teachers' Views

A) Students' Views

The findings from the students' survey and interviews both highlight how the senior management team supports students, teachers and parents.

I am encouraged by the principal and deputy-principal to reach my full potential in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	262	46.0%
Agree	261	45.8%
Neutral	39	6.8%
Disagree	7	1.2%
Strongly Disagree	1	0.2%

Figure 17(a)

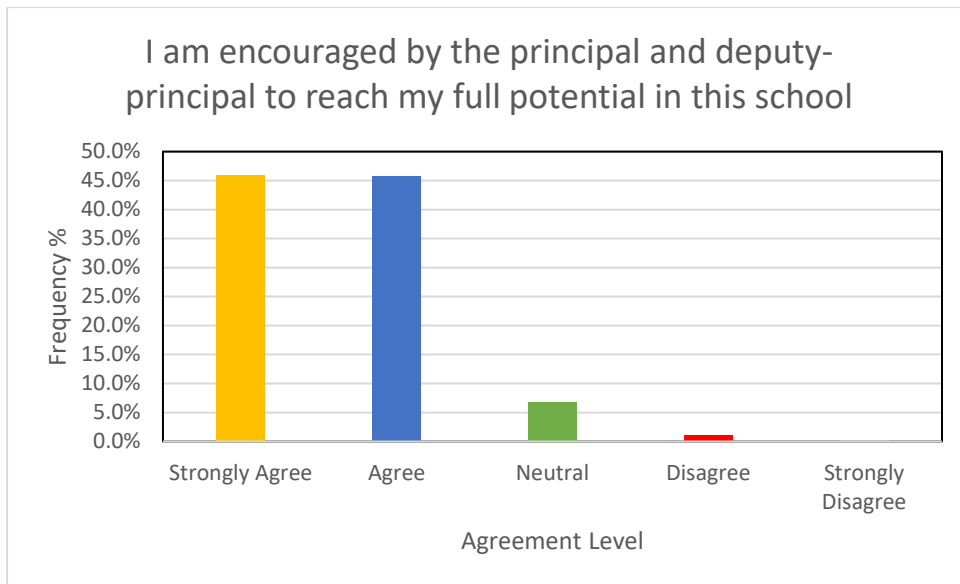


Figure 17(b)

A total of 91.8% of students strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that ‘I am encouraged by the principal and deputy-principal to reach my full potential in this school’ (see Figure 17 above). The principal and deputy principal demonstrate care for the students, the findings reveal.

The principal and deputy principal look after the students in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	290	50.9%
Agree	236	41.4%
Neutral	39	6.8%
Disagree	4	0.7%
Strongly Disagree	1	0.2%

Figure 18(a)

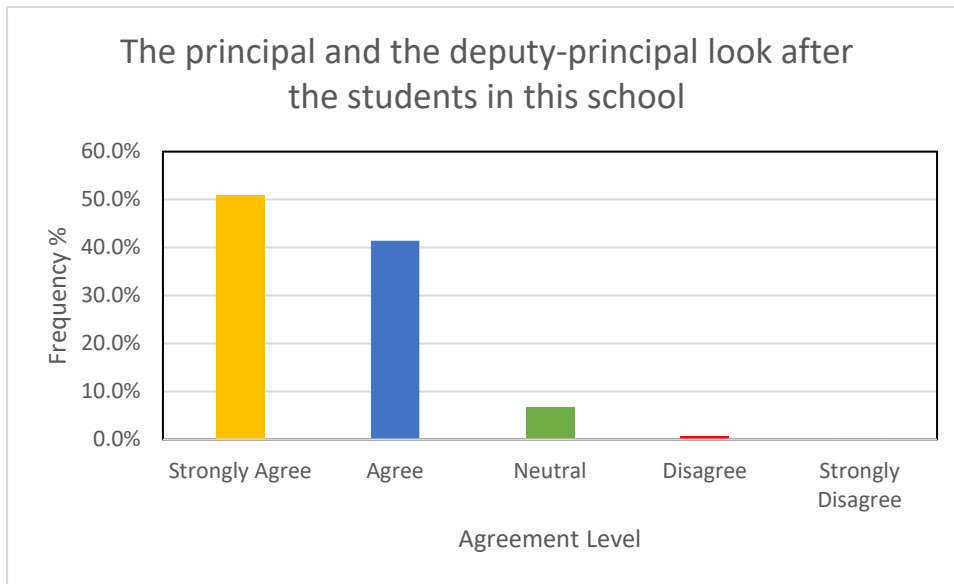


Figure 18(b)

When the students were asked if ‘the principal and deputy principal look after the students in this school’, 50.9% strongly agreed and 41.4% agreed (see Figure 20 above). These opinions were carried through to interviews where all current students especially highlighted the open-door policy, with students having a direct line of communication with senior management, in person and online, as part of caring for the well-being of students. According to Student A:

‘They are in touch with the students. If I was in difficulty, I could send an email to the principal or deputy. If I wished to speak with them, that would be no problem either’.

Student B found the senior management team willing and able to sort out problems or difficulties efficiently:

‘They are open to talk to you. I had a few problems ... that were sorted out straight away, especially with the principal, she had no problem solving problems, she got straight on it. Everything was sorted out’.

B) Parents’ Views

Senior management were regarded by the vast majority of parents as being very helpful.

The principal and deputy-principal are very helpful in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	203	61.5%
Agree	113	34.2%
Neutral	6	1.8%
Disagree	3	0.9%
Strongly Disagree	5	1.5%

Figure 19(a)

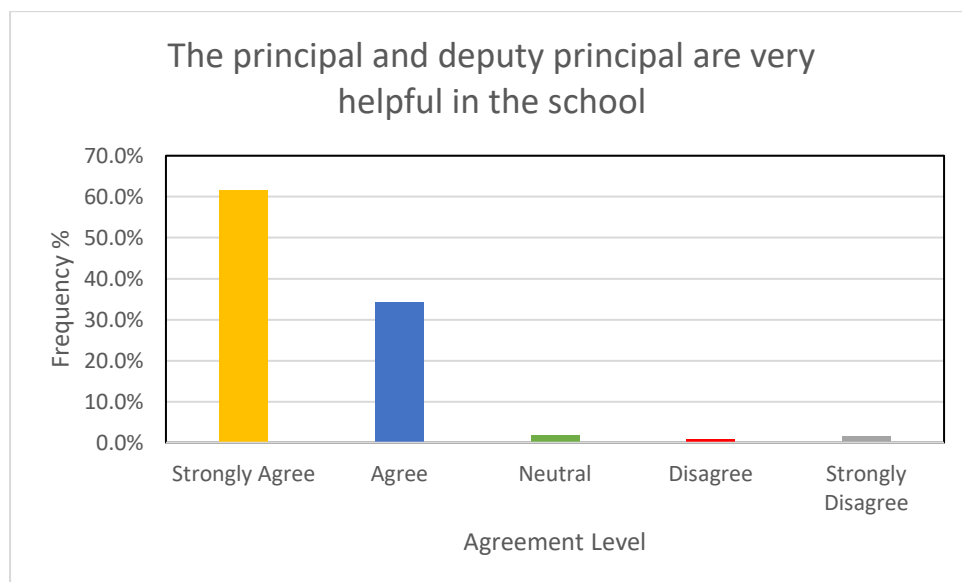


Figure 19(b)

95.7% of parents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, ‘the principal and deputy principal are very helpful in this school’ (see Figure 21 above). Findings from interviews correlate with the survey findings in relation to the principal and deputy-principal being helpful to parents. Parent B comments on the strong senior management team (the current team), and the support they provide to both parents and their children:

The support I got from the principal in particular was amazing in terms of getting my kids into the school and getting them settled’.

Parent A says:

'you knew that it was a two-way thing and that both parties across the table – management and myself – had my child's best interest at heart'.

C) Teachers' Views

Continuous professional development is seen as absolutely necessary for teachers to be lifelong learners.

I am encouraged by management to avail of continuous professional development		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	18	58.1%
Agree	11	35.5%
Neutral	2	6.5%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

Figure 20(a)

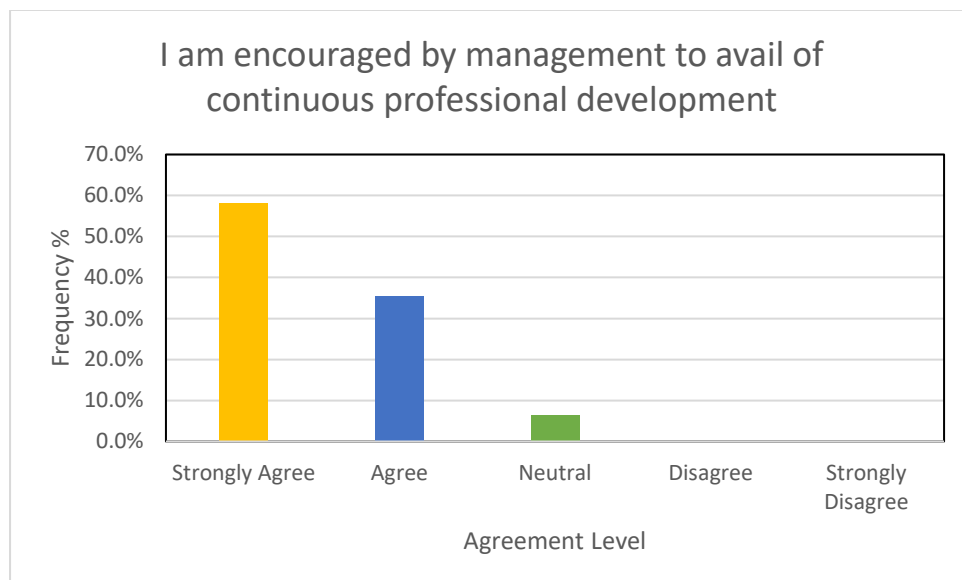


Figure 20(b)

93.6% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that they were supported and encouraged by senior management to avail of continuous professional development (see Figure 20 above).

The deputy principal opines that a culture of continuous professional development is fostered in the school:

‘We have that culture in terms of CPD, whereby we inculcate that culture through our instructional leadership programme, JCT, senior subject changes ...we inculcate and foster that CPD in-house as well’.

‘At staff meetings we have between 40 minutes, and one hour and 10 minutes Continuous Professional Development session, peer on peer’

Resources for teaching have a direct impact on academic achievement, and are therefore considered essential for improved academic outcomes.

Teacher resources are provided by management in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	18	58.1%
Agree	11	35.5%
Neutral	2	6.5%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

Figure 21(a)

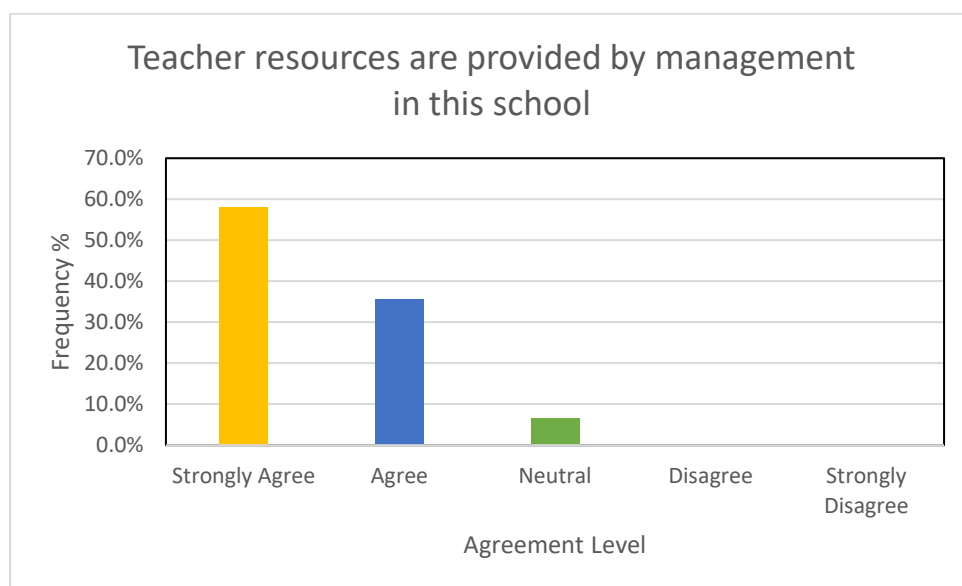


Figure 21(b)

93.6% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that teacher resources are provided by management in the school (see Figure 21 above). Teacher M stated:

‘So there would be a sense from the principal that if you needed something to help you with your class teaching, whatever it was, that, yeah, you could do it’.

Teacher M opines that the teachers were given resources to make teaching better for the students:

‘We are given resources with the understanding that these resources will allow the students to excel and to get a higher grade in the state exams. The children in this school now get great help, the help encourages students and teachers to put in a great effort and it shows in the results. The students are delighted’.

The inspectors in WSE (2005) recommended that staff be given further opportunities to meet in order to facilitate professional discussion. This demand was very quickly implemented in the New Regime to facilitate dialogue, collaboration and professional conversations.

Teachers collaborate well and share good practice with each other in this school.		
	N	%
Always	22	71.0%
Most of the time	7	22.6%
Some of the time	1	3.2%
Rarely	1	3.2%

Figure 22(a)

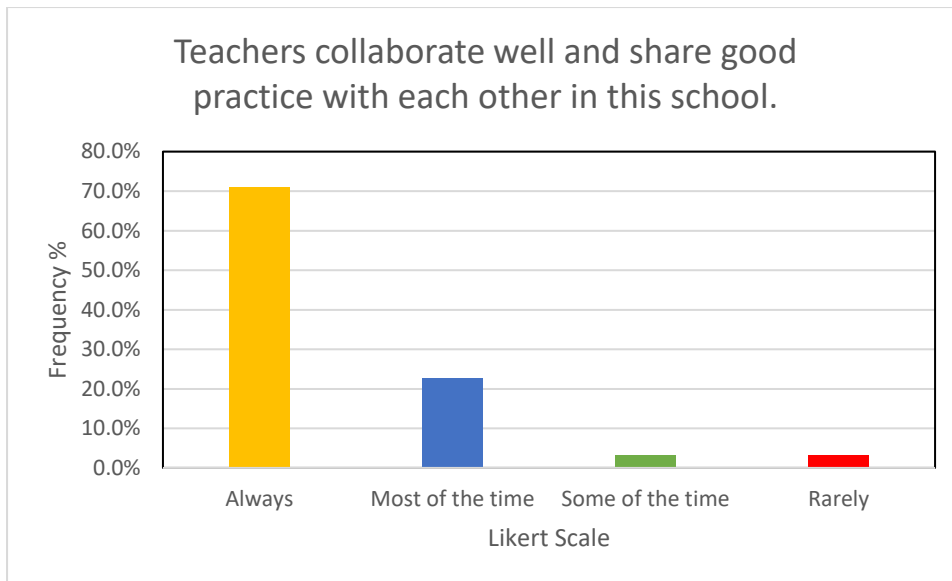


Figure 22(b)

93.6% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that teachers collaborate well and share good practice with each other in this school (see Figure 22 above). The time and space for teachers to collaborate is facilitated by the principal of the school.

The senior management structure is effective in this school.		
	N	%
Neutral	5	16.1%
Agree	16	51.6%
Strongly Agree	10	32.3%

Figure 23 (a)

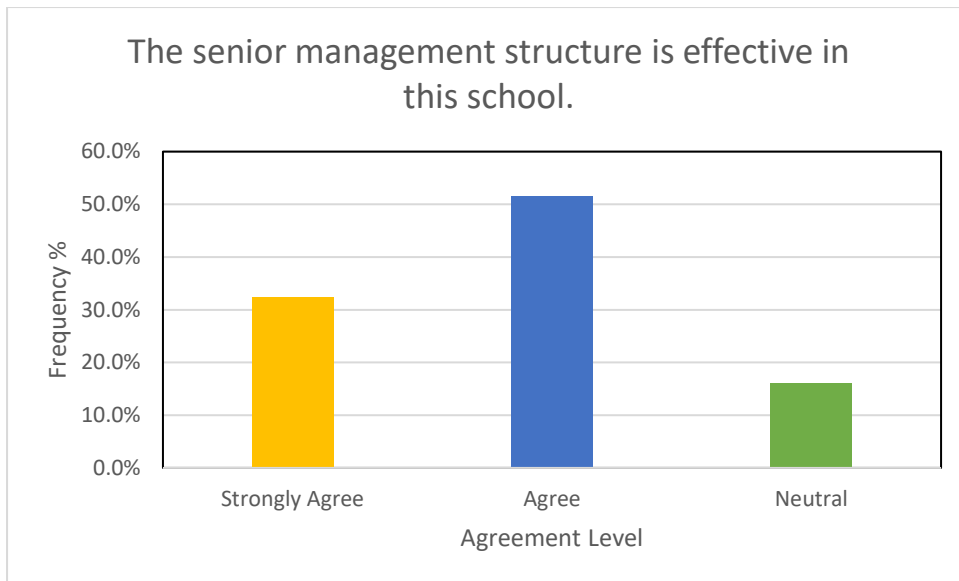


Figure 23(b)

Altogether 83.9% of teachers strongly agree or agree that the senior-management structure is effective in this school (see Figure 23 above).

4.41 Improved Systems and Structures in the New-Regime Findings

Recommendations from WSE (2005) were to formulate a school plan and work on School Self Evaluation (SSE), and these recommendations were implemented, as revealed in the following findings from the New Regime.

School Self-Evaluation is used to improve students' learning in this school		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	11	35.5%
Agree	14	45.2%
Neutral	3	9.7%
Disagree	3	9.7%

Figure 24(a)

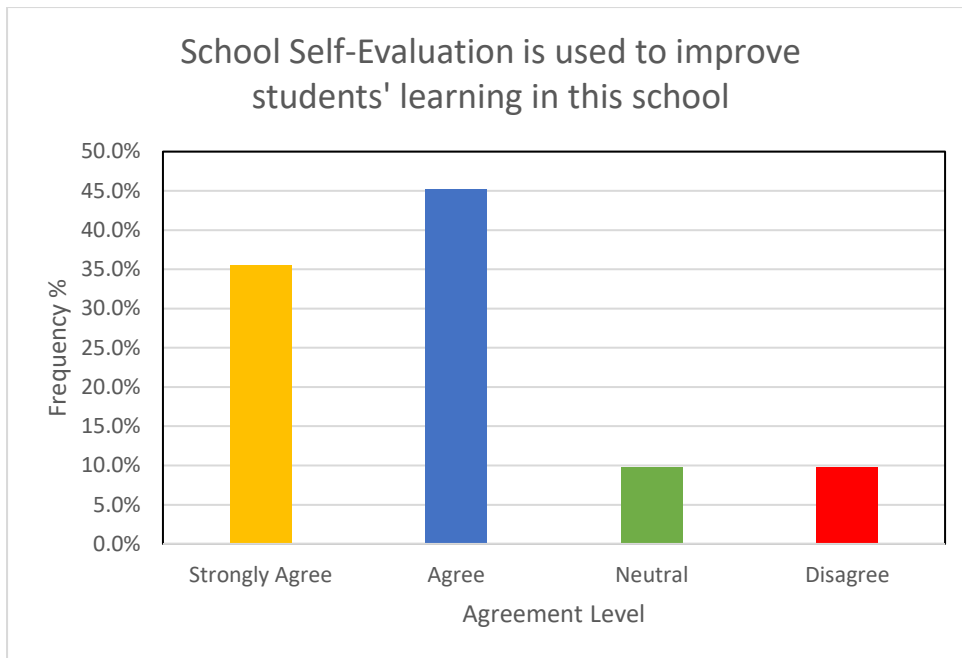


Figure 24(b)

A total of 80.7% of teachers strongly agree or agree that School Self Evaluation is used to improve students' learning in this school (see Figure 24 above).

School Planning is carried out efficiently in this school in accordance with best practice.		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	23	74.2%
Agree	6	19.4%
Neutral	2	6.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

Figure 25(a)

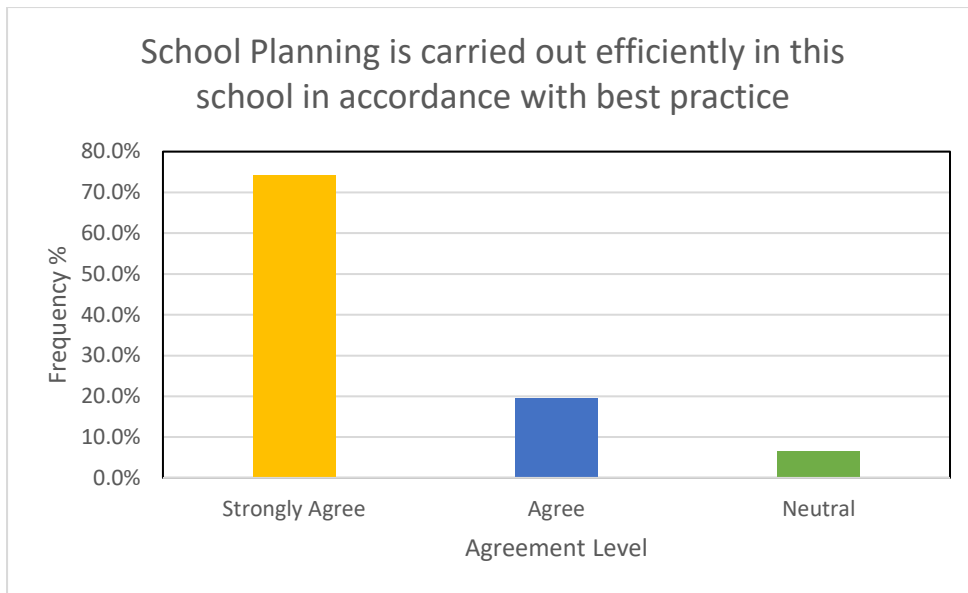


Figure 25(b)

The vast majority (93.6%) of teachers strongly agree or agree that school planning is carried out efficiently in this school in accordance with best practice (see Figure 25 above). Further recommendations from WSE (2005) were to instigate regular meetings of subject departments in order to improve teaching and learning.

The subject department structure in this school supports teaching and learning effectively		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	22	71.0%
Agree	6	19.4%
Neutral	2	6.5%
Disagree	1	3.2%

Figure 26(a)

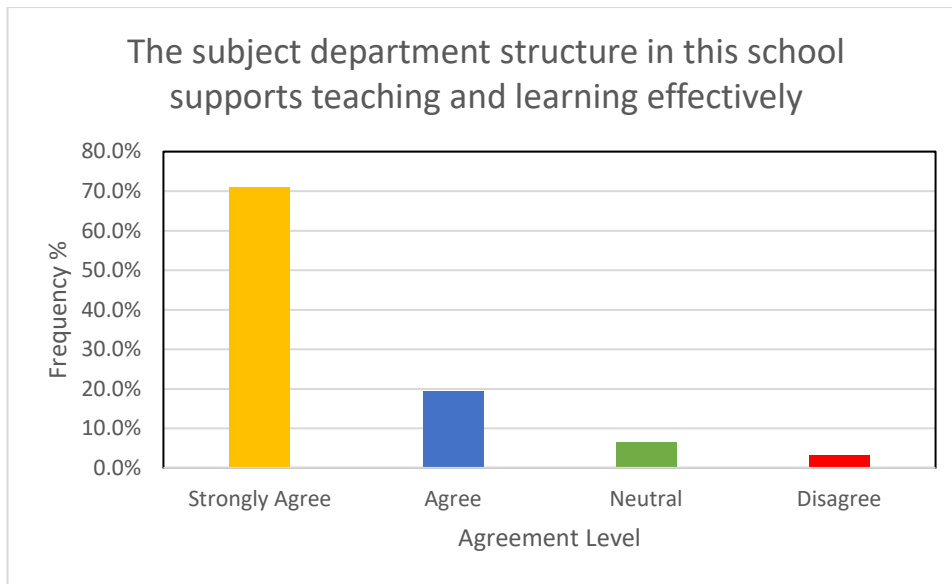


Figure 26(b)

A very high percentage (90.4%) of teachers strongly agree or agree that the subject department structure in this school supports teaching and learning effectively (see Figure 26 above). A review of the middle-management structure was to proceed urgently, according to the recommendations from WSE (2005); this involved re-structuring the existing duties of post-holders who formed the middle-management team in the school.

The middle management structure is effective in this school (post-holders)		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	5	16.1%
Agree	21	67.7%
Neutral	1	3.2%
Disagree	3	9.7%
Strongly Disagree	1	3.2%

Figure 27(a)

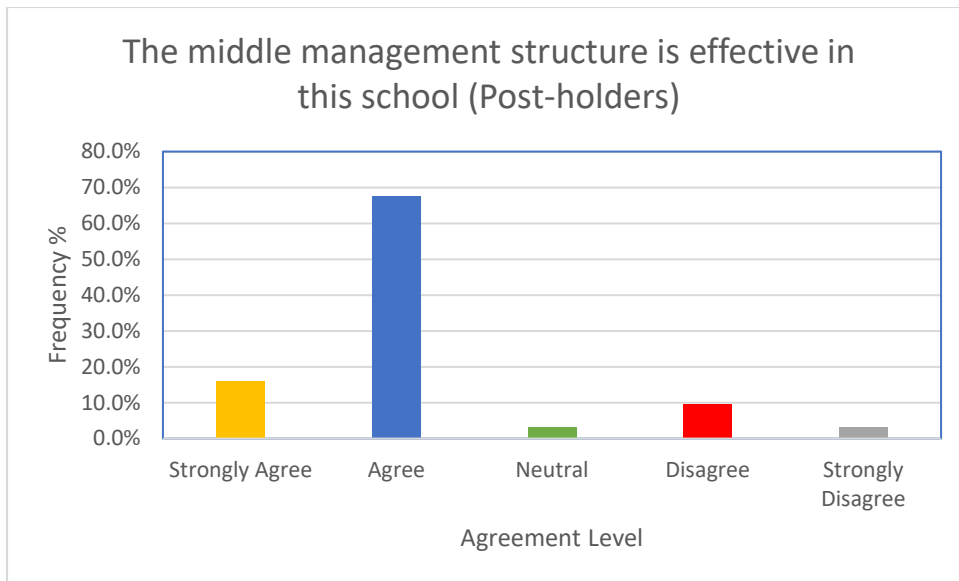


Figure 27(b)

83.8% of teachers strongly agree or agree that the middle-management structure is effective in this school (middle-management structure, post-holders, posts of responsibility are part of a school’s leadership and management structure) (see Figure 27 above). Senior management take the views of teachers on board as part of the decision-making process, which is reflected in the findings.

The view of teachers is part of the decision-making process in this school.		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	10	32.3%
Agree	14	45.2%
Neutral	4	12.9%
Disagree	3	9.7%

Figure 28(a)

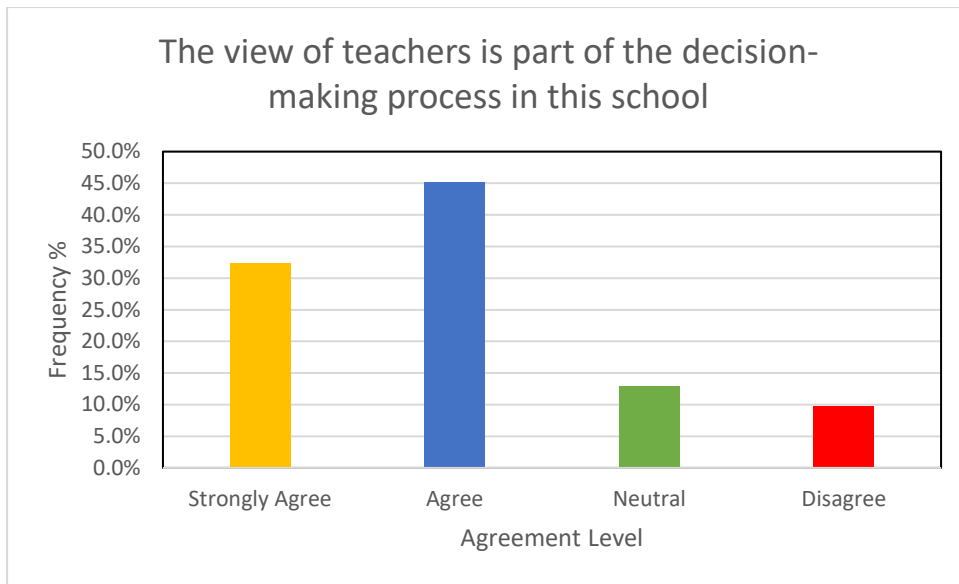


Figure 28(b)

The view of teachers is part of the decision-making process in this school. according to 77.5% of teachers, who strongly agreed or agreed with this statement (see Figure 28 above).

4.42 Evening, Weekend and Holiday-Time Study Possibilities – Findings New Regime

To improve academic results, and to facilitate final-year students who did not have study facilities at home, evening study and weekend study were introduced free of charge for third, fifth, and sixth-year students. This study was introduced by the principal in September 2005 as a result of having participated in a successful initiative to promote access to higher education for materially disadvantaged students in West Dublin. Although this school was not designated as disadvantaged (despite having 20% of the cohort coming from materially disadvantaged homes), the principal considered that providing supervised study was a means of encouraging study, and therefore promoting academic achievement in the school. Study was supervised as a collaboration by the principal and the parents. The quantitative findings from the students' surveys showed that the majority of students appreciated and benefitted from the variety of extra study options that was offered.

I like having the opportunity to go to study directly after school if I wish		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	223	39.1%
Agree	239	41.9%
Neutral	88	15.4%
Disagree	12	2.1%
Strongly Disagree	8	1.4%

Figure 29(a)

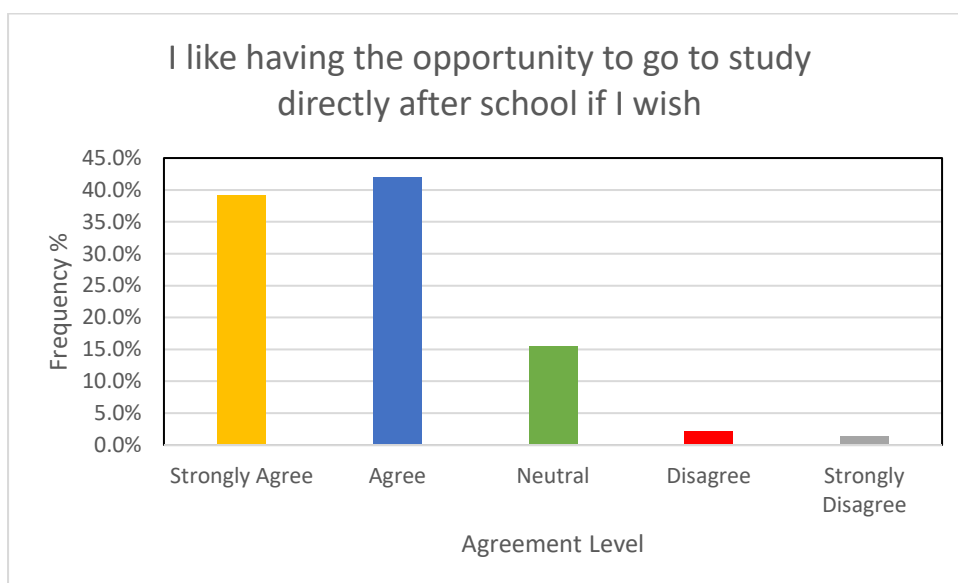


Figure 29(b)

81% of students strongly agree or agree with the statement that ‘I like having the opportunity to go to study directly after school if I wish’ (see Figure 29 above).

I like having the opportunity to go to evening study if I wish (Mon - Thurs)		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	214	37.5%
Agree	226	39.6%
Neutral	104	18.2%
Disagree	16	2.8%
Strongly Disagree	10	1.8%

Figure 30(a)

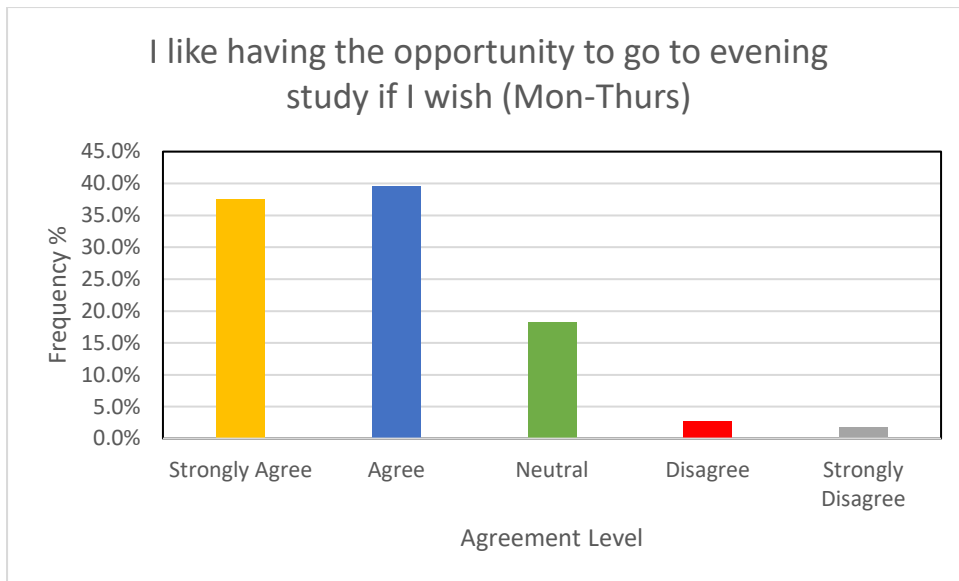


Figure 30(b)

77.1% of students strongly agree or agree with the statement that ‘I like having the opportunity to go to evening study if I wish’ (see Figure 30 above).

I like having the opportunity to go to study on Saturdays and Sundays if I wish		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	189	33.2%
Agree	222	38.9%
Neutral	111	19.5%
Disagree	32	5.6%
Strongly Disagree	16	2.8%

Figure 31(a)

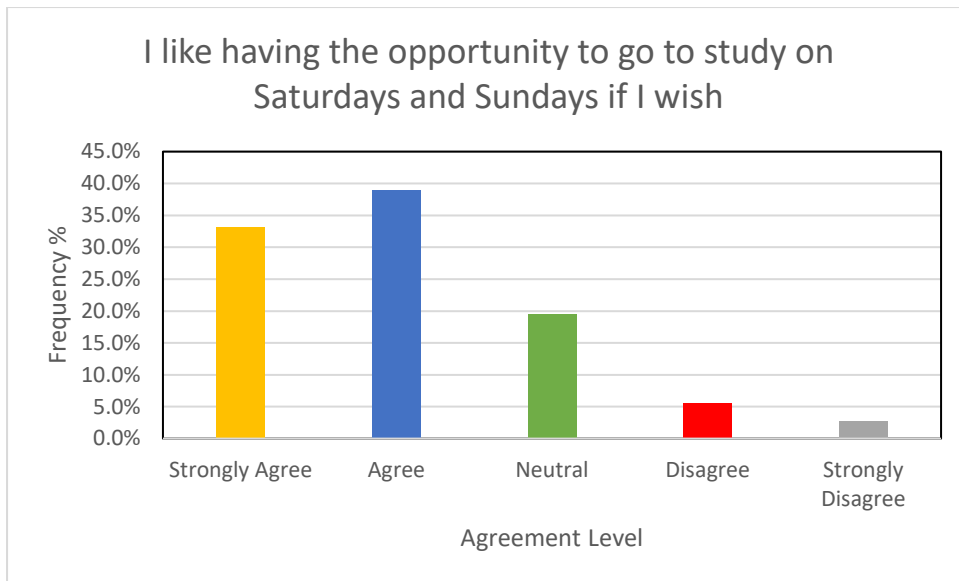


Figure 31(b)

72.1% of students strongly agree or agree with the statement that ‘I like having the opportunity to go to study on Saturdays and Sundays if I wish’ (see Figure 31 above). Student C highlighted the importance of this facility for them:

‘I think students’ study at weekends and evening time is a great facility for everyone to use, particularly for those of us going for high points courses, it does not happen anywhere else, to my knowledge’.

Student D agrees with this assessment:

‘I think there is a real encouragement from all the teachers, the principal and deputy-principal, to do the best we can academically, and the after school study helps promote high academics for the students’.

Past Pupil R also mentioned the importance of supervised study:

‘We had night study, which was on almost every single day of the week, and then we had weekend study, and study during the holidays which was supervised by parents and our principal, this helped us a lot to do well in our exams’.

Evening/night study made a significant contribution to affording students the opportunity to study in school. Many students took advantage of the opportunity to stay in school until 9 pm and on Saturdays, Sundays and during school holidays. Many parents were happy that there was a facility to study in the school during the school holidays so that the students could study for State examinations.

I am happy with the study provided at weekends and during school holidays (free of charge)		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	141	42.7%
Agree	82	24.8%
Neutral	95	28.8%
Disagree	1	0.3%
Strongly Disagree	11	3.3%

Figure 32(a)

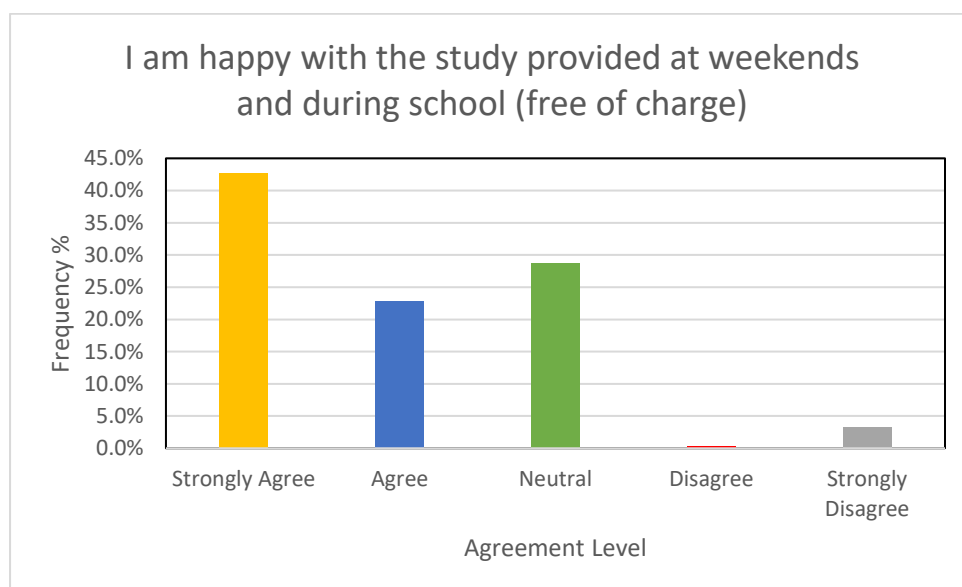


Figure 32(b)

67.5% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that they were happy with the study provided at weekends and school holidays free of charge (see Figure 32 above). Parent B was happy with the introduction of supervised study, free of charge:

‘The supervised study absolutely was one of the best initiatives, that was attending the study on a regular basis and many of those students would not have had the space, the place without the financial burden on their family, to be able to go and quietly sit for two hours, four days a week, and six hours of the weekend. And that is so absolutely amazing. All of my kids did the study and it really set them up for university.’

Introducing supervised study in the evenings, weekends and during holidays was greatly appreciated by students and parents. It allowed students to do homework and revise for tests/State examinations.

4.43 School Building and Facilities – Findings New-Regime

In the WSE (2005), it was reported by the inspectors that the board, parents and staff expressed concerns about the fabric of the school, saying that the building looked grim and uninviting. Concerns were also raised that windows in the school were becoming hazardous. This problem was also highlighted in the WSE (2005) report by the inspectors. In the New Regime, the past pupils noticed the improvements that had been achieved by the ‘new’ principal, with financial help from the Department of Education to improve the school building. Past Pupil C remembered:

‘We got new bathrooms, which were always clean, new school equipment, new Home Economics rooms and new Science Labs’.

It was stated that all students respect their environment, and they feel respected in turn as a clean, cared for school is provided for them, with modern facilities. Teacher M reported on how students now respect their environment:

‘Students have a great sense of respect and pride for this school’.

This teacher also recognises that the cleaning staff and the caretaker work hard to maintain the school in great order, and that the students see and appreciate that. As Teacher L remarks:

‘Our cleaners, our caretaker work really hard ... students pick up on that’.

4.44 Quality of Curriculum Provision Findings New Regime

The purpose of a quality curriculum provision is to provide all students with the knowledge, skills and cultural capital (Tedesco et al., 2014) (the social assets that promote social mobility within a stratified society) they need to succeed in life. In WSE (2005), the inspectors recommended that a more inclusive review take place regarding student needs in relation to subject choice. This recommendation was immediately implemented by the ‘new’ principal. The student surveys reveal that the majority of students are aware of the wide subject choice available.

There is a wide choice of subjects in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	101	17.7%
Agree	317	55.6%
Neutral	110	19.3%
Disagree	38	6.7%
Strongly Disagree	4	0.7%

Figure 33(a)

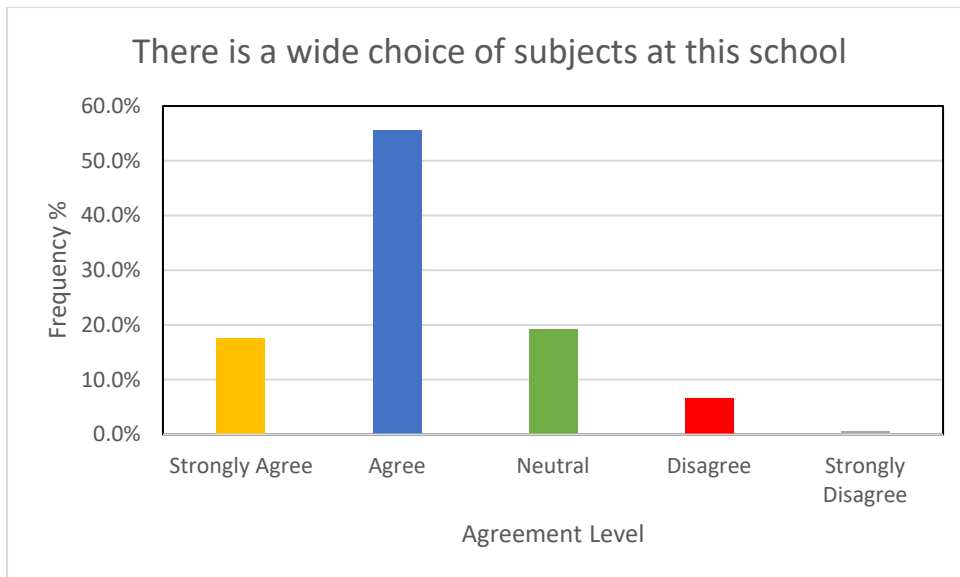


Figure 33(b)

In the student survey, 73.3% of students strongly agreed or agreed that there is a wide choice of subjects in this school (see Figure 33 above). The teachers concur that there is a wide subject choice available to the students.

The curriculum offered by this school is sufficiently broad to meet the needs of our students.		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	23	74.2%
Agree	4	12.9%
Neutral	2	6.5%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	6.6%

Figure 34(a)

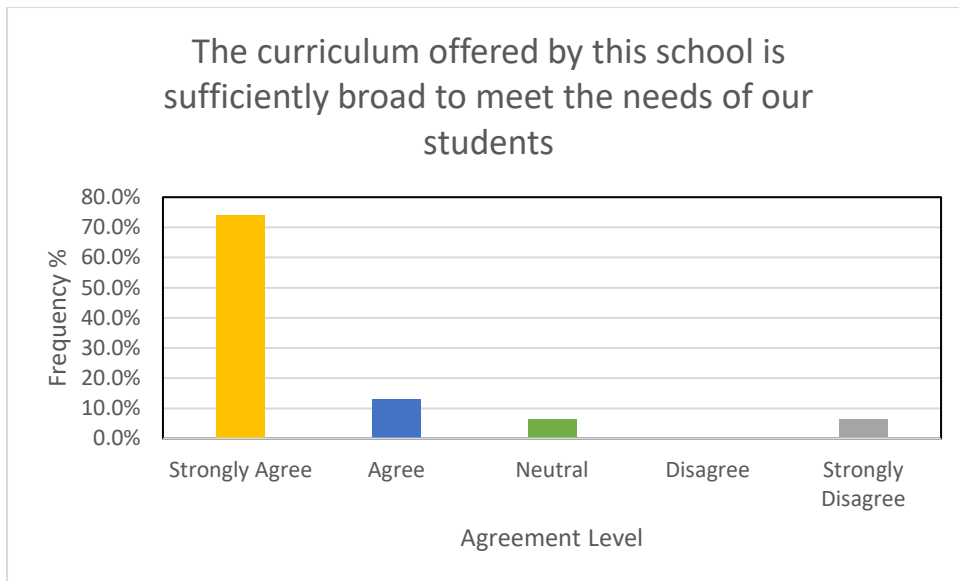


Figure 34(b)

In the teacher survey, 87.1% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that the curriculum offered by this school is sufficiently broad to meet the needs of their students (see Figure 34 above). The deputy is aware that it is necessary to provide a balanced curriculum for students in a school, and therefore the principal worked closely with the Department of Education for some years when numbers were low, to provide as balanced a curriculum as possible. The deputy principal stated:

'We've always provided a great subject curriculum for our students. I think that's really something that has served our students well.'

With regard to teacher allocation, the deputy principal stated:

'When the numbers were low, the principal worked with the Department to get an extra allocation, that was necessary for a while.'

Teacher A maintains that the curriculum caters for the needs of all the students:

'I think one of the big things and it's something students don't really see is the choice of subjects that they have, they have so much choice that every child will find their niche.'

Having an extensive curriculum is necessary to give the students the greatest choice in order to allow them to reach their potential. In WSE (2005), the inspectors noted that Chemistry was not always an option in fifth year; from 2005/2006 all science subjects were options for the Leaving Certificate examinations.

4.45 Changes in Behaviour and the Principal's Leadership Style – Findings New Regime

In WSE (2005), it was reported by the inspectors that discipline was one of the key issues for the future of the school. It was one of the issues that needed the immediate attention of the 'new' principal. The new principal made immediate changes regarding acceptable behaviour through interacting with students and being present on the corridors at all times, making evident to students what behaviour was acceptable and what was not. Past Pupil J stated:

'I think that we thought nothing would change, but we were mistaken ... I remember she started pulling people up for things on the corridor. She never raised her voice, but we knew that she meant business'.

In addition, Past Pupil C made the following comment:

'she seemed to be doing it on her own. When there were fights up the town, she went out on her own to break them up'.

That same past pupil opined that the fabric of the school

'was in a bad state when she came, students and teachers were used to chaos ... she was going to have a very hard time'.

Past Pupil C also emphasised the dramatic change to student behaviour due to the arrival of the new principal and her particular leadership style:

'There was a big change, the poor behaviour was not tolerated anymore, nor was the shouting and roaring ... that kind of seemed to become a thing of the past ... It was a different regime.'

Past Pupil C continued to outline the leadership style of the new principal, and the effect of same on the students:

'If any students did step out of line, there would be consequences and 'no' wasn't taken for an answer.'

Past Pupil C stated that changes took place for teachers as well:

'the dramatic changes included the role of the teacher.'

Parent A uses the term 'checklist' to itemise all of the changes the new principal had to make on taking over the role of principal on the 1st September 2005 after the Whole School Evaluation, which took place in May 2005. These items included uniform, discipline and academic achievement, with emphasis being placed on the students taking higher-level papers, and highlighting communication, which was mandatory between parents as well as student and teachers if levels were to be changed. The comments were as follows:

'When my son first started, it wasn't too long after those recommendations and it was obvious that the new principal who was new to the school, had a lot on her plate. She seemed strong though, and it was perceived that she was a no nonsense woman ... So my initial and first experience of maybe perhaps a checklist would have been in relation to

the culling of bad behaviour, and the discipline and the academic expectations and taking pride in the school.'

4.46 Theme 3: School Climate

Tableman (2004) suggests that school climate is formed by different parts of the school; the building provides a comfortable environment for optimum learning, while the social environment promotes positive communication and interaction among stakeholders, and the emotional environment creates a sense of belonging, especially among students. Finally, the academic environment develops a learning system, which encourages all towards achievement.

Under the theme School Climate, the following sub-themes will be described: Atmosphere and Welcome; Student Voice; Student Well-being; Impact of School Climate on Academic Achievement; Changes in New Regime; Ethos; Student/Teacher Relationships.

4.47 Atmosphere and Welcome

Former Inspector 1 stated:

'Officially, as inspectors, we are not looking for anything, we are looking at ... School Climate, that is the feeling you get when you enter the school premises. It's about the atmosphere in the school'.

Feeling welcome is a critical factor of the school climate.

I feel welcome in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	131	39.7%
Agree	146	44.2%
Neutral	24	7.3%
Disagree	6	1.8%
Strongly Disagree	23	7.0%

Figure 35(a)

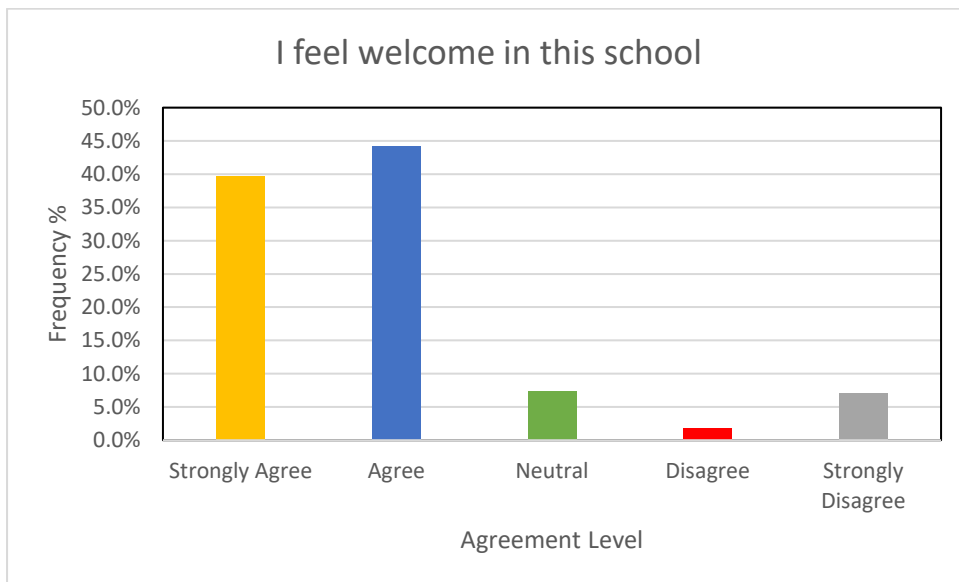


Figure 35(b)

The parents' survey revealed that 83.9% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that 'I feel welcome in this school' (see Figure 35 above). Student B concurred on the welcoming school atmosphere:

'as soon as you walk into the school, you feel so welcomed'.

There is a good atmosphere in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	171	51.8%
Agree	134	40.6%
Neutral	22	6.7%
Disagree	2	0.6%
Strongly Disagree	1	0.3%

Figure 36(a)

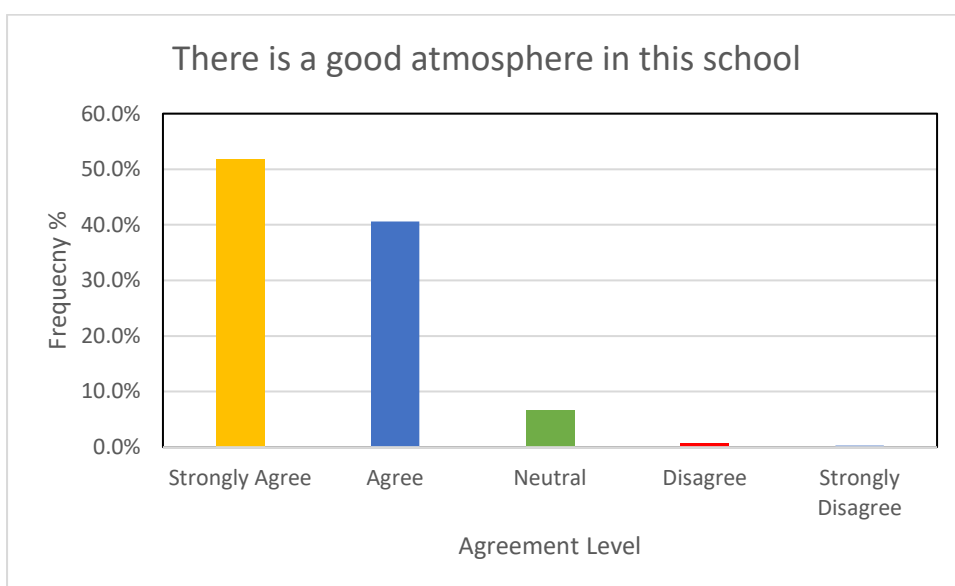


Figure 36(b)

Altogether, 92.4% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that ‘There is a good atmosphere in this school’ (see Figure 36 above). Student D concurs:

‘There is a calm atmosphere, a good atmosphere in this school’.

4.48 Student Voice Findings – New Regime

The findings in the student survey reveal that the students have a voice and are listened to by their teachers.

Teachers listen to me and pay attention to what I say		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	196	34.4%
Agree	266	46.7%
Neutral	88	15.4%
Disagree	19	3.3%
Strongly Disagree	1	0.2%

Figure 37(a)

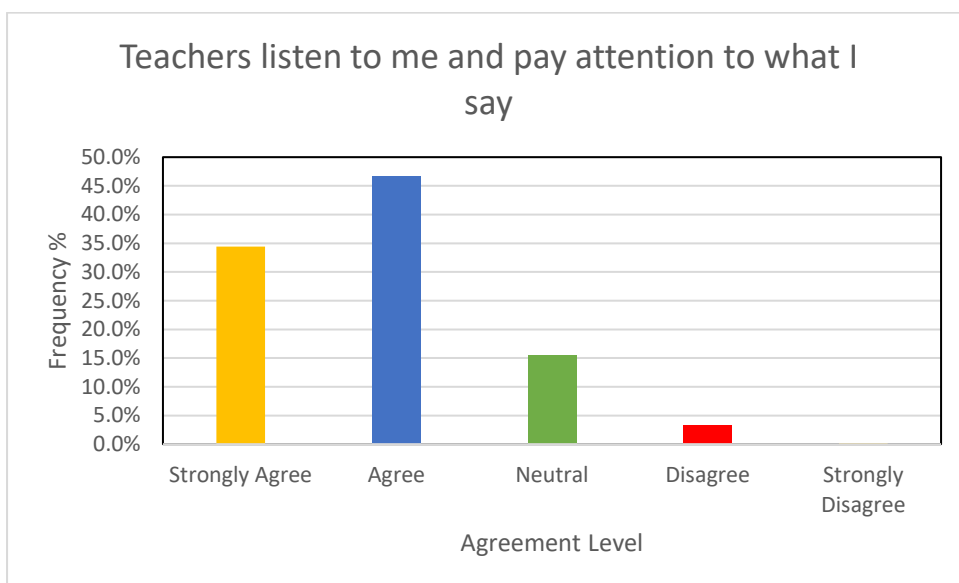


Figure 37(b)

A total of 81.1% of students indicated that teachers always or usually listen to them and pay attention to what they say (see Figure 37 above).

I have a say in how things are done in this school		
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	10	1.8%
Disagree	132	23.2%
Neutral	223	39.1%
Agree	150	26.3%
Strongly Agree	55	9.6%

Figure 38(a)

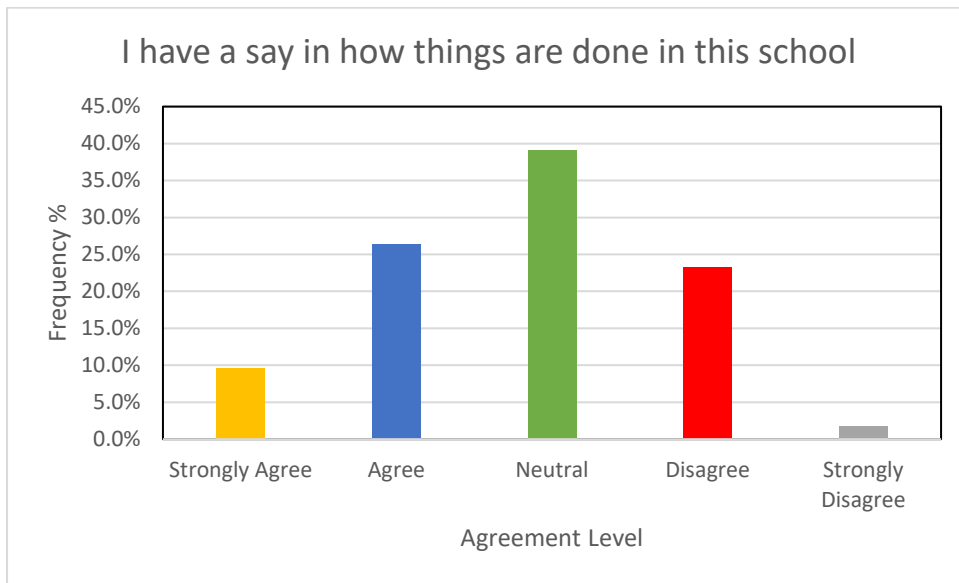


Figure 38(b)

Altogether 35.9% of students agree or strongly agree with the statement that they have a say in how things are done in this school, while 25% of students disagree or strongly disagree with this statement (see Figure 38 above).

4.49 Student Well-Being – Findings New Regime

Students are aware of the support systems that are in place for them, including those provided by the principal, the deputy, the guidance counsellor and teachers. Student A stated:

'I've never felt like there's nobody that I can't go up to talk to about something'.

According to Student D:

'Well there's our guidance counsellor who's available to go to anytime and the principal makes it clear that if you have any problems, it's okay to visit her ... and talk about it all the teachers and the deputy principal make it clear that they're available to talk to you as well'.

Strong teacher/student relationships lead to better student engagement and a better school environment. Safety at school plays an important role in every student’s development and success. Students learn better when they feel safe.

I feel safe when I am in school		
Responses	N	%
All of the time	329	57.7%
Most of the time	211	37.0%
Some of the time	26	4.6%
Almost Never	4	0.7%

Figure 39(a)

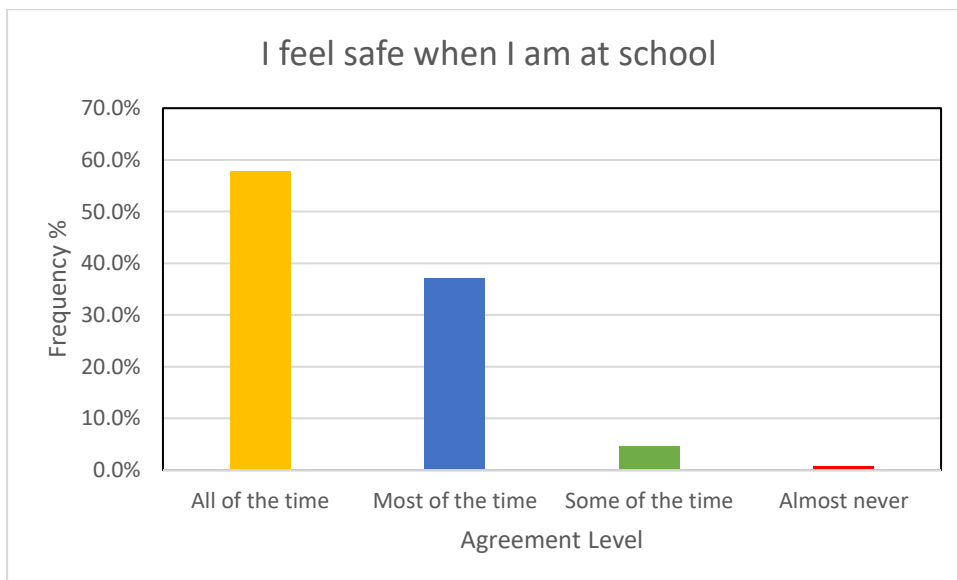


Figure 39(b)

In sum, 94.7% of students stated that they feel safe when they are at school all of the time or most of the time (see Figure 39 above). Student D highlights the role that the principal plays in the well-being of all the students:

‘I think that the principal makes it quite obvious that she cares a lot about all the students, and makes them feel like they’re in a safe environment’.

Respectful relationships are seen as significant in the holistic education of the student.

My child is treated fairly and respectfully in the school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	134	40.6%
Agree	143	43.3%
Neutral	22	6.7%
Disagree	6	1.8%
Strongly Disagree	25	7.6%

Figure 40(a)

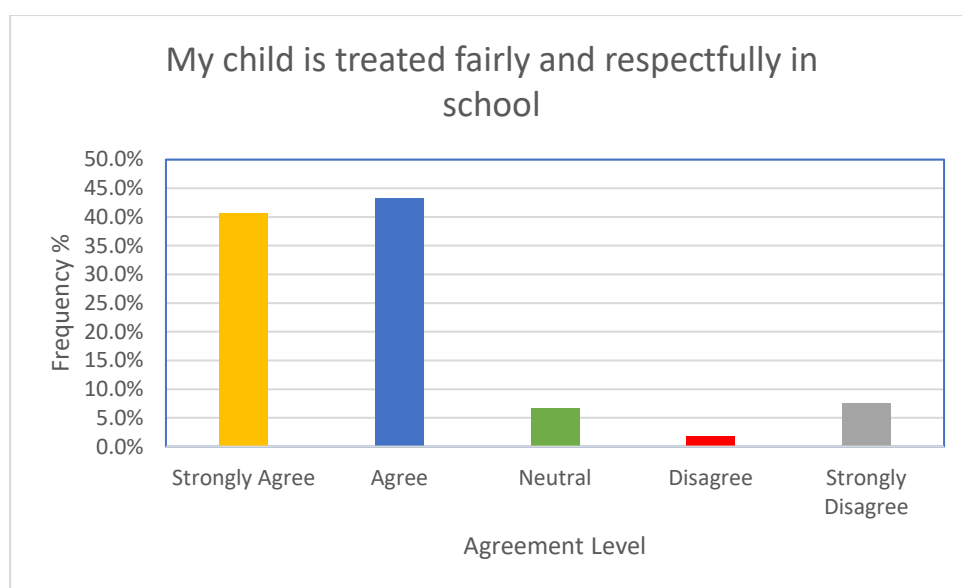


Figure 40(b)

In sum, 83.9% of parents strongly agreed or agreed that ‘my child is treated fairly and respectfully in the school’ (see Figure 40 above). Student C concurs with this view:

‘There is a respect and a friendliness here, between students and teachers’.

‘We are taught to be kind, respectful, fair people in school. I think we very much follow those ideals. I think that there is a lot of respect in this school for everyone’.

4.50 Impact of School Climate on Academic Achievement – Findings New Regime

Student D highlights the impact of school climate on academic achievement:

'It provides a good environment for students to learn in, when they get on well with their teachers'.

Student C concurs with this viewpoint:

'I think that the teachers have a good relationship with the students, so it makes the students want to do well, and it provides a good environment for students to learn in when they get on well with their teachers. I think that the teachers are really good here, and students tend to do well'.

Teacher C reflects on the school culture:

'I think that this is our school culture, the students are so ambitious, even asking for feedback'.

Teacher B speaks about the role of high teacher expectations:

'There's so much less chasing of work ... they have high expectations as well.'

Past Pupil B commented on class discipline:

'There wasn't any messing at all, there wasn't disruption and stuff in the class and people were there to learn ... I really enjoyed it'.

According to the above views, teacher expectations, classroom management, teaching methodologies including feedback, and positive student/teacher relationships all contribute to an environment that is conducive to learning, leading to high academic achievement.

4.51 Changes in School Climate – Findings New Regime

The school climate showed evidence of total change, which in turn impacted behaviour and consequently the learning environment. Furthermore, the changes in the school climate improved the school environment for the teachers as well as the students. In turn, these changes were remarked upon by the local community. This shows how the school climate impinges on all the stakeholders. Teacher B comments on the changes in this school in the New Regime:

‘It (the school climate) has totally changed’.

Commenting on the impact of systemic change, Teacher B remarks:

‘The whole system now seems to be, everybody’s on board with making the overall system work’.

‘I find that students are pleasant and polite.’

‘The staff meetings, there just isn’t the same drama as there used to be in the years before 2005’.

‘It is so much easier, so much easier in school now’.

Teacher L also talks about how the school is regarded in the community now as a result of the changes:

‘We are perceived in the community as a great caring school’.

Past Pupil J gave a synopsis of the change that occurred:

‘The atmosphere in the school changed ... the behaviour just improved dramatically’.

Past Pupil A concentrated on respect in the school:

‘I think there is a lot of respect for the students’.

This concurs with the view of Student A:

'It's just a respectful community is the best way I can describe it'.

As a result of the positive changes to the school climate, students feel proud of their school.

I am proud to be a student in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	157	27.5%
Agree	308	54.0%
Neutral	101	17.7%
Disagree	4	0.7%

Figure 41(a)

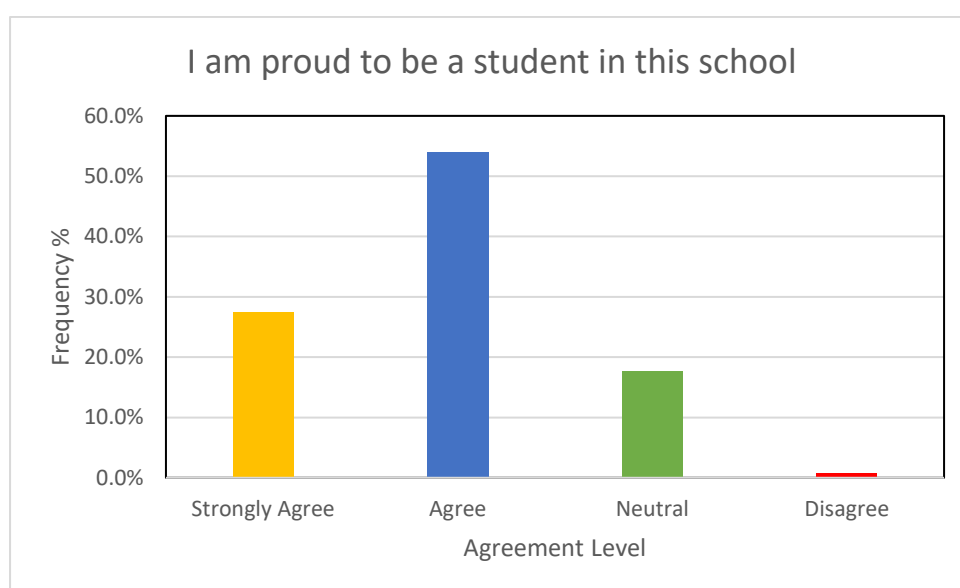


Figure 41(b)

A total of 81.5% of students strongly agree or agree that they are proud to be a student in this school (see Figure 41 above). This concurs with Teacher M's view:

'Students have a great sense of respect and pride for this school'.

Parents also said that their children are proud of this school.

My child is proud to be a student of the school/my children are proud to be students of the school		
	N	%
Strongly agree	155	47.0%
Agree	137	41.5%
Neutral	33	10.0%
Disagree	3	0.9%
Strongly disagree	2	0.6%

Figure 42(a)

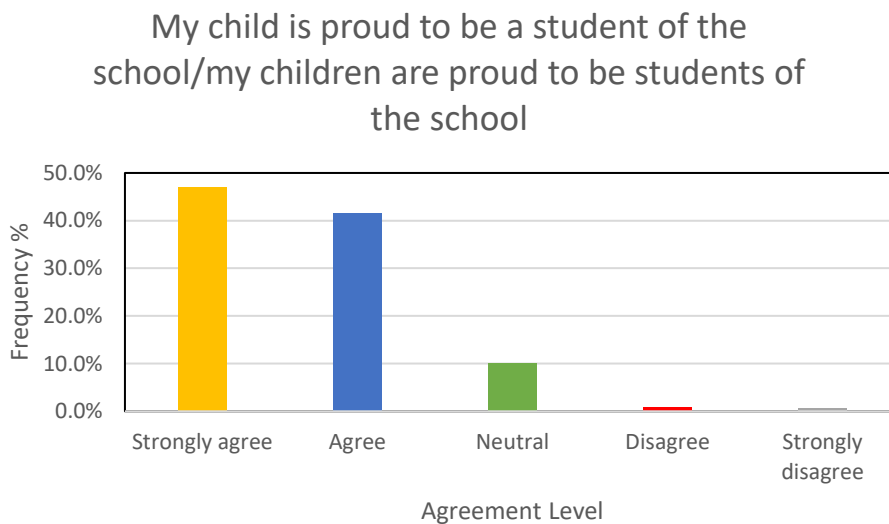


Figure 42(a)

88.5% of parents strongly agree or agree with the statement that ‘My child is proud to be a student of the school/my children are proud to be students of the school’ (see Figure 42 above).

Recommending this school to any new student is an indication of the pride that students feel about their school.

I would recommend this school to any new student		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	247	43.3%
Agree	236	41.4%
Neutral	76	13.3%
Disagree	8	1.4%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.5%

Figure 43(a)

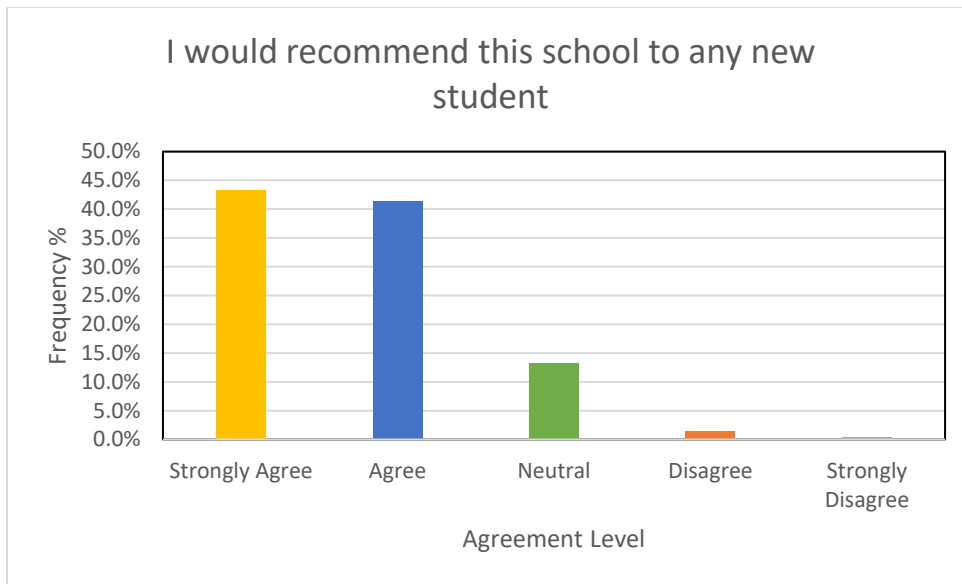


Figure 43(b)

84.7% of students strongly agree or agree that they would recommend this school to any new student (see Figure 43 above).

4.52 Ethos Findings – New Regime

Student C talked about the Catholic ethos in the school:

‘There’s also an encouragement to be kind, a good person, and considerate, and it’s backed up by Catholic moral teaching ... There is an awareness in this school to give back, in the principal’s words, pay it back’.

Student D cites the ambiance, the ethos and respect:

‘We are taught to be kind, respectful, fair people in school. I think we very much follow those ideals in school. I think that there is a lot of respect in this school for everyone ... There is a nice calm atmosphere ... we have fun, sometimes, the principal jokes after the notices with us’.

Student A was conscious of the school climate being evident as soon as one entered the school:

'I would say there is a Catholic ethos in the school, and you will be able to pick up on that just by walking in'.

Teacher A comments on the reciprocal nature of school climate:

'I suppose they are gospel values ... you are demonstrating care and attention for each other'.

Teacher A talks about the Catholic ethos in the school now being one of inclusivity:

'I suppose, for me, the Catholic ethos comes down to being a school for everybody ... there is a place for everybody here'.

Student B notes that the values were reflected in the way people treat each other:

'There is a nice community spirit and that probably stems from the Catholic ethos, inclusivity and kindness and looking out for each other, respect. I think it is nice the way that there is a good camaraderie between people that go to the school. I think everyone gets on well, everyone looks out for each other. There is no tolerance of bullying or anything like that. We definitely live those values in the school'.

Survey findings reveal that the vast majority of teachers believe that the core values of this school are implemented in the day-to-day life of the school.

The core values of this school are implemented in the day-to-day life of the school.		
	N	%
Strongly Agree	16	51.6%
Agree	14	45.2%
Neutral	1	3.2%

Figure 44(a)

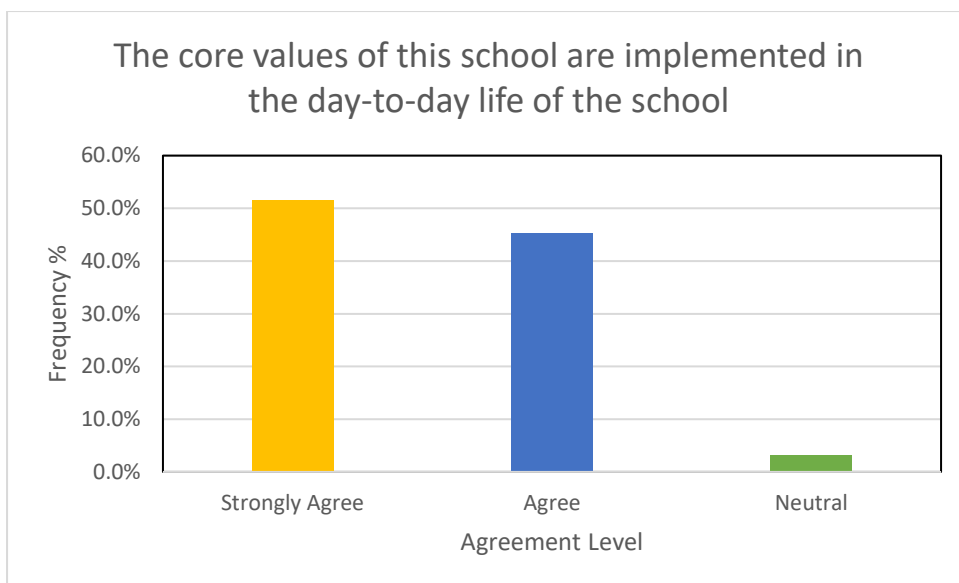


Figure 44(b)

96.8% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that the core values of this school are implemented in the day-to-day life of the school (see Figure 44 above).

4.53 Student/Teacher Relationships Findings – New Regime

Hattie (2012) created ten ‘mind frames’ that teachers need to adopt in order to maximise student success. Mind Frame 7 states that: ‘Teachers/leaders believe that it is their role to develop positive relationships in classrooms/staff rooms’ (Hattie, 2012, p. 165).

There is a good student-staff relationship in this school		
Responses	N	%
Strongly Agree	21	67.7%
Agree	7	22.6%
Neutral	2	6.5%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	1	3.3%

Figure 45(a)

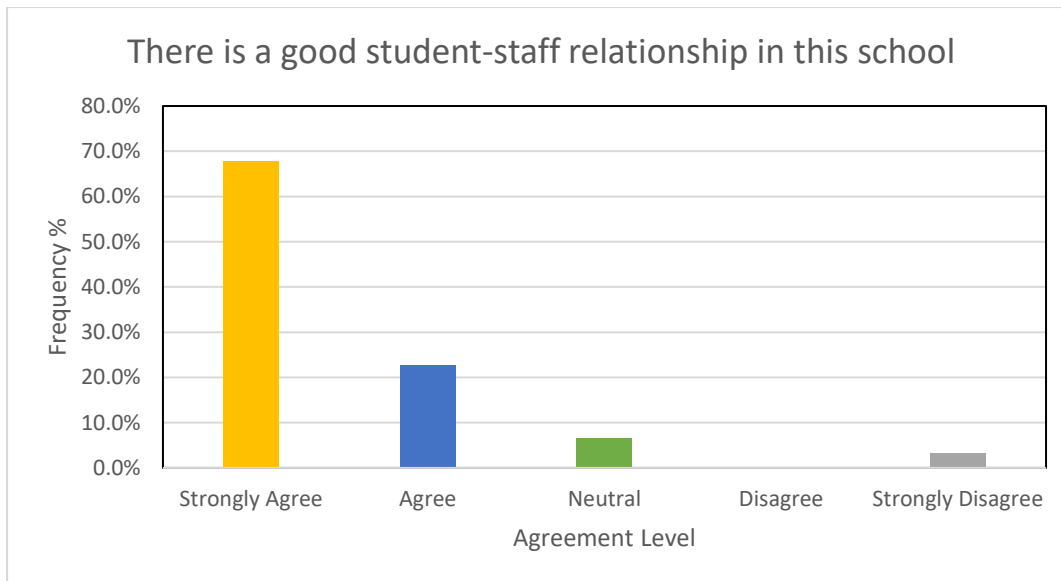


Figure 45(b)

Altogether, 90.3% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that ‘There is a good student-staff relationship in this school’ (see Figure 45 above). The students emphasise the student/teacher relationships in the school and that they are seen as significant. Student B noted:

‘the student-teacher relationships are absolutely amazing’.

Student C concurs:

‘There is a respect and a friendliness, between students and teachers’.

Commenting on the relationship between students and management and teachers, the deputy of the school was positive:

‘I think that we have a great relationship with the students ... Kids are not afraid to come up ... and have a chat ... speak with the year-head or teacher, and be frank and robust’.

In sum, a positive student-teacher relationship fosters an empathic environment and produces success for both the student and the teacher.

4.54 Conclusion

This Findings chapter has shown that the research question has been front and centre of all of the research activity undertaken during the course of this study. From the outset, this research has been quite unique in terms of a principal undertaking a study on whether three inspection reports, namely WSE (2005), WSE-MLL (2015) and FTI (2018) and the recommendations following each inspection, which the principal duly implemented and enacted, provided a blueprint for improvement and educational change in this school.

The three themes presented in this Findings chapter – teaching and learning, leadership and management and school climate – emanated from a document analysis of the inspection reports of 2005, 2015 and 2018 and also most importantly from close reading of the quantitative and qualitative findings from the participants, namely, current students, past pupils, parents, teachers, the deputy principal, former inspectors and the ancillary staff of the school. The overall main finding of this chapter is that the recommendations provided by the inspectors in their WSE reports did provide a blueprint for improvement and educational change in this school.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, will form a discussion and conclusion of the implications of this study. It will also make a case as to how this study can contribute to the general discourse on school inspection, with recommendations for future research and suggestions for policy initiatives that may enhance the quality of school inspection.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This present study highlights the extent of the educational change that has taken place between 2005 and 2021 in the school that is the focus of this study; the catalyst for this change was the blueprint provided by the inspectors' WSE report produced in 2005. The WSE (2005) report stated in no uncertain terms that things had to change or else the school faced possible closure. The inspectors covered every aspect of the change required in their reports, including the discipline structure, the necessary review of posts of responsibility, the strategic plan, and the abolition of streaming.

The WSE (2005) report was used as a blueprint for educational change and school improvement; these were effected in my capacity as principal. Any reluctance or challenge experienced resulting from these necessary changes was balanced by reference to this said report. Therefore, it was an exceedingly useful document to chart the educational change and school improvement required in this school. In fact, the findings reveal that the inspectors' report was not just useful; it was essential for the school as part of its educational-change journey. Hence, the findings of this present study emphasise the fact that a principal can be a more effective change agent when cloaked in the armour of strong inspection.

The changes suggested by the inspectors are here conveyed under the framework of educational change theory, as proposed by Fullan et al. (2005). This framework incorporates eight key drivers of educational change, as outlined in Chapter 2: Literature Review. Seven out of eight key drivers are relevant to this study and are therefore referred to in this discussion. The first key driver of educational change is called 'moral purpose' and is here presented in two parts, namely 1A, which deals with Streaming and 1B, which deals with School Climate.

5.2 Key Driver of Educational Change 1A: Moral Purpose and Streaming

Moral purpose requires educators ‘to close the gap in student achievement’ (Fullan, 2002). The inspectors who carried out the WSE (2005) required significant educational change to be implemented with regard to streaming. The process of allocating students into streams based on their entrance examination results is referred to as ‘streaming’. This consisted of one standardised test and three non-standardised tests on Irish, English and Maths, which were set by the teachers in the school. The practice of streaming was operational for several decades in this school before the WSE (2005). The WSE report of 2005 stipulated that streaming should be immediately abolished in the school. This took one year to implement.

Sukhnandan and Lee (1998, p. 55) suggest that streaming allocations ‘are based on tests and are not value-free’, and this was evidently the case in this school. Furthermore, findings reveal that those in lower-stream classes were allocated to ordinary level in all subjects and these tests, particularly because only one was a standardised test, ‘ignore the variation in pupils’ abilities across subjects’. The inspectors interestingly commented on the inappropriateness of some students being placed in the lower streams, as those students demonstrated much greater ability in class than this placement suggested. The literature reveals that evidence exists of the disadvantages to those assigned to lower streams (Sukhnandan and Lee, 1998; Smyth, 2018).

The literature emphasises that ‘mobility between streams is rare’ (Sukhnandan and Lee, 1998, p. 55). However, findings reveal that in this school, it was upward mobility that was almost non-existent, while downward mobility was a constant threat; both of these scenarios caused self-esteem issues and stress for students, as evidenced in the findings in this study when a past pupil stated that there was pressure on the students in the higher streams to do well in school examinations, otherwise

they would be demoted; that and those who were demoted stopped caring and stopped working. It is suggested in the literature that placement in a low stream impacts negatively on pupils' self-esteem 'leading to a decrease in their levels of motivation and hence their achievement' (Sukhnandan and Lee, 1998, p. 55). Furthermore, the literature (Smyth, 2018) reveals that students learnt to label themselves as a result of being labelled by the school. A past pupil assigned to the lowest stream in the school, where the students sat ordinary-level papers, labelled himself as being 'ordinary' (see Chapter 4). He ultimately went on to obtain a primary degree and Masters qualification in the USA as a mature student.

The literature considers the impact that being placed in a low stream can have on the future academic achievements of students. Smyth states that 'curriculum differentiation at lower secondary level is found to have significant consequences for access to higher level subjects within upper secondary education and thus for performance in the high stakes upper secondary exam' (Smyth, 2018, p. 17). This was shown in the words of the interview with Ancillary Staff 1, who was also a past pupil, and who explained the ramifications of being in the bottom stream. Although she was moved to the second-highest stream after the results of the State examination, the Intermediate Certificate (now known as the Junior Certificate) at aged fifteen, she was not allowed to sit higher-level papers in Irish, English and Mathematics in Senior Cycle due to the fact that she sat ordinary-level papers in her Intermediate examination. She rightly felt that her life chances were affected by these decisions at school level, over which she had no control.

Furthermore, the findings reveal boredom and disengagement experienced by students as a result of being placed in a low stream. This led to behavioural issues, even resulting in suspension, which one student interviewee described as an ineffective method of classroom management (this student went on to obtain a degree and Masters qualification in the USA). Other behavioural issues were

revealed when teachers stated in their interviews that they could not cover the course due to the constant interruption of teaching and learning, the habitual lateness of students to class and requests to use the bathroom, which concurs with the literature (Smyth, 2018; OECD, 2009).

In addition, low stream placement led to teachers employing a more restricted range of methodologies, which further fuelled boredom and disengagement, and the findings reveal that teachers had low expectations of these students. This concurs with the literature on streaming practices (Sukhnandan and Lee, 1998; Boaler et al., 2002; Smyth, 2018). There was a moral imperative, according to the inspectors, to abolish streaming in the school, and this moral imperative could not be ignored.

5.3 New Regime – Abolition of Streaming Practices and Subsequent Progression Rates to Higher Education

It is worth noting that research in the USA found that all students, in both higher and lower streams, benefitted academically when streaming was removed from their school (Burriss and Welner, 2005). Therefore, the request by the inspectors that streaming be abolished has its basis in the literature on streaming, and was consequently implemented with due haste by the principal in the New Regime. Furthermore, the cessation of the practice of streaming also met the moral imperative of closing the gap in student achievement, which is the first and foremost key driver in Fullan et al.'s (2005) theory of educational change.

The evidence for this is clear when one examines the progression rates, which showed that the percentage of students in this school who went on to third-level education was 44.32% in 2005 in the Old Regime, and rose to 96% in 2020 in the New Regime. This one fact alone justifies the single-most significant finding in the present study; that the inspectors' WSE (2005) report

did indeed provide a blueprint for educational change. All of the interventions in the school were driven by the recommendations of the inspectors. The implementation of the recommendations was driven by the moral imperative of giving the students a quality education. Building on the moral imperative to provide students with equal learning status within the school community, the next key driver, 1B Moral Purpose and School Climate, will consider the elements vital to this process.

5.4 Key Driver of Educational Change 1B: Moral Purpose and School Climate

The literature reveals that school climate incorporates various elements, including student behaviour, student/teacher relationships, and student voice (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). Therefore, the findings related to school climate will be discussed under these sub-headings: student behaviour, student/teacher relationships, and student voice.

5.5 Moral Purpose and Student Behaviour – Old Regime

Fullan et al.'s (2005) theory of educational change prioritises moral purpose as an essential key driver of change. They maintain that schools need to figure out 'how to speed up the learning of those who are at the bottom, those for whom the school system has been less effective' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 54). The findings of the present study during the time of the Old Regime regarding student behaviour clearly indicate that for many students in this school, the system had badly let them down.

Students do not feel safe in a school climate where discipline has broken down, as revealed by Thapa et al. (2013) and Gregory et al. (2010). The literature shows that students need an environment that is conducive to learning in order to progress well; 'effective schools set the conditions which foster teaching and learning within the classroom' (Smyth and McCoy, 2011,

p. 8). The characteristics of an effective school include high teacher expectations, an orderly environment, as well as involved and committed staff, students and parents (Smyth and McCoy, 2011, pp. 8-9). The findings of the present study indicate that these characteristics were lacking in the Old Regime. Past pupils opined that teacher expectations were low in general, and teachers stated that they could not get the course covered due to the poor behaviour of the majority of students in the class. The literature reveals that negative student-teacher relationships may lead to discipline problems, low self-esteem and poor academic performance (Sointu et al., 2017).

The school climate is reflected clearly in the state of the plant; the plant comprises the actual school buildings and the various classrooms, specialist rooms, corridors, toilets, and outside areas. The literature supports this view: 'Perceptions of physical quality of the school building and conditions of classrooms are important for fostering school climate that is conducive to student learning' (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015, p. 137). The interview findings reflect what the situation was like during the Old Regime: past pupils noted that the upkeep of the building left a lot to be desired, and they particularly mentioned the dreadful state of the toilets. Ancillary Staff 2 noted the large number of windows broken at weekends and that once they were fixed, they were broken again. The physical quality of the school building and the conditions of the toilets and classrooms did not foster a climate in the school that was conducive to learning, and the negative impact of this is highlighted in the literature (Rutter et al., 1979; Rusby et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2016).

The language used by the interviewees, including terms such as *war zone*, *battle zone*, *wild west*, *vandalism*, *decrepit*, *decaying*, reflects the state of the negative school climate in existence at the time. It is worth noting that a teacher used the term *battle zone* and a student

used the term *war zone* during completely independent interviews. It is interesting how the school climate for both teachers and students inspired metaphors of violence, which are diametrically opposed to the lens of the moral purpose of schooling.

The inspectors' report (WSE 2005) stated that the reputation of the school had fallen into disrepute. Furthermore, the WSE (2005) report intimated that pride in the school was considered to be at a low ebb during the Old Regime. Pride is linked to surroundings and school climate, which incorporates behaviour and academic achievement (Potter et al., 2002). The findings from the interviews with the parents and ancillary staff indicate the state of play during the Old Regime. The view of parents and Ancillary Staff 2 indicate that the reputation of the school was at a low ebb. In addition, the view in the community was that the school had a poor reputation for academic achievement, as well as a dismal reputation for poor discipline. OECD research (2009) reveals that school climate has a significant impact on academic achievement as well as on student well-being.

5.6 Student Behaviour – New Regime

Findings show that the behaviour of students in the New Regime contrasted significantly with that of students during the Old Regime. A key finding from the New Regime was identified by the students who reported that the behaviour of other students in the class had no negative effect on their ability to meet their learning objectives. The teachers agreed with this assessment of considerable improvement. In terms of the whole school, students and parents were very happy with the new discipline structures in the school. Of course, some students took time to come around, but with zero tolerance of poor behaviour, the school became a much calmer place. The findings from the interviews of students reiterated this; the students opined that shouting and roaring were no longer acceptable behaviours in the school, and therefore these

behaviours diminished over time. Students talked about the ethos of care and safety in the school, and this is consistent with the literature as described by Gregory et al. (2010), who found that students' feelings of safety improved if caring adults were accessible, and by Thapa et al. (2013), who found that enforcement of fair and consistent discipline led to increased physical and emotional safety.

Students revealed that teaching standards were very high in the school. The students were aware that teacher expectations play a significant role in student outcomes, as described in the literature by Smyth and McCoy (2011). Teachers in turn reported that the students were very ambitious, aiming to achieve good results, and worked hard to do so. Teachers also commented on the mutual respect in the school between students and staff; OECD (2009) research highlighted that mutual respect is an important aspect of high-quality student-teacher relationships.

The provision of evening and weekend study was cited by nearly all students and parents as being of major assistance in facilitating academic achievement. The provision of evening and weekend study in this school was based on a model provided by the Clondalkin Higher Education Access Programme, as described in the literature by Fleming and Gallagher (2003). Study was open to all, and most importantly it was free of charge; no person who supervised study was paid. The students were always grateful to the principal and parents who supervised study. This was evident on each and every evening or weekend. The provision of supervised study broke the cycle of disadvantage for many students, and is consistent with the literature on Access Programmes (Fleming and Gallagher, 2003). Many students in the school who did not have facilities at home, and who aspired to achieve high points in the Leaving Certificate examination in order to pursue courses such as medicine, actuarial studies, pure maths or

physics at university, often considered the provision of study in the evening and at weekends as being key to their success.

Findings by Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) emphasised the importance of students' surroundings; the condition of the plant itself had dramatically changed; the findings of the present study reveal how the past pupils noticed their changed environment during the New Regime. The toilets in the school were refurbished thanks to a grant from the Department of Education in 2006. It is noteworthy as the findings in this study state that the toilets are kept in exemplary condition by the students. This is a far cry from the state of the toilets described by students, staff and ancillary staff in the WSE (2005) report as being '*dirty*', '*vandalised*' and smelling of cigarette smoke. Shortly after the toilets were refurbished, the Home Economics rooms and science laboratories were also refurbished, thanks once again to the Department of Education who funded same. The students were particularly impressed; they described the new facilities as being '*top class*', '*always clean*' and '*inviting*'. Pride in the school was being restored and it was noticeable, not just by those in the school, but also by parents and the local community. In addition, it was evident that the school building in general was well cared for by the students. It was not unusual to see students picking up papers in the dining area after lunch, and cleaning down tables to make sure that the school building was clean and tidy for all those who used it.

The findings in this study confirm that the students are very proud of this school now, and this is revealed to be an important characteristic of effective schools (Potter et al., 2002). Indeed, they confirm that they would recommend the school to others. This is very significant as it shows that the school has travelled quite a way along the road to school improvement. Smyth and McCoy (2011) opine that it is highly significant in terms of school climate that students feel pride in their school. Parents confirm in the surveys that their sons/daughters are proud of

this school. It must be acknowledged in truth that without the recommendations of the Inspectorate, and the implementation and enactment of same, this transformation may not have taken place. Almost all of the interventions in the school stemmed from the recommendations of the inspectors' reports.

5.7 Student-Teacher Relationships – New Regime

The literature shows that supportive teacher-student relationships (Martin and Dowson, 2009; Smyth and McCoy, 2011; Maxwell, 2016) are a crucial element of a positive school climate. In the findings in this study, the vast majority of students state that they get on very well with their teachers. This is evident not only in the classrooms and the corridors of the school but also during extra-curricular activities, which is significant as the literature highlights that these are the areas where most discipline problems may occur in a school that is not deemed to be effective (Rusby et al., 2011; Rutter et al., 1978). There is a warmth in the relationships in this school between students and staff, reflecting the positive school climate, which was recognised by the inspectors. It is especially important because, as Thapa et al. (2013, p. 9) found, 'a positive school climate not only contributes to immediate school achievement but its effect seems to persist for years'.

Martin and Dowson (2009) use the term 'relational pedagogy' to describe the impact that the relationship between student and teacher has on educational outcomes; this relationship impacts a student's motivation and hence their academic achievement. Furthermore, Martin and Dowson (2009) posit that these relationships can also impact a student's self-esteem. Well-being is considered an important aspect of school climate in this school, and the findings bear this out; this is consistent with the literature on effective schools, as described by the Department of Education in their framework document *Looking At Our School* (LAOS, 2022).

The vast majority of students agree that they feel cared for in this school; in addition, the overwhelming majority of students indicate that they feel safe when they are at school (Thapa et al., 2013; Gregory et al., 2010).

Kutsyuruba et al. (2015, p. 137) speak about the significance, in terms of well-being and corresponding academic success, of all the relationships that a student has, namely, with teachers, peers, management and parents. The literature therefore concurs, in terms of well-being and academic success, with the interview findings of the present study, which reflect the positive relations between students, teachers and management.

5.8 Student-Teacher Relationships – Old Regime

The interview findings reveal the stark disparity between the student-teacher relationships in the Old Regime and those described above relating to the New Regime. This is clearly conveyed in the following comments from a past pupil, who described the climate in the Old Regime as the *'old classic authoritative model'* based on fear. He elaborated that the school climate was somewhat dictatorial, and that it had all of the hallmarks of an autocracy. In his opinion, the students had no voice.

The literature shows that positive student/teacher relationships are far more conducive to learning than negative relationships based on fear (Smyth and McCoy, 2011). Byrne and Smyth (2010) posit that negative student/teacher relationships can even lead to early school leaving, such is its profound effect. In the Old Regime, it is evident from the findings in this study that students were rarely, if ever, consulted regarding their education, and that this had a very negative effect on school climate. Sointu et al. (2017) found that a negative student/teacher

relationship may have a long-lasting effect on a student, leading to negative school outcomes including problematic behaviour, low self-esteem and poor academic performance.

5.9 Student Voice and Moral Purpose

Student voice has a significant influence on school climate (Brown et al., 2020; Faddar et al., 2021). Moral purpose involves closing the gap between high-performing students and lower-performing students; school climate has a significant role to play in achieving this state of affairs. ‘School leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students’ (Fullan et al., 2002, p. 17). Furthermore, ‘the cultural change principal displays explicit, deep, comprehensive moral purpose’, according to Fullan et al. (2002, p. 17).

Hart’s Ladder (1992) reflects the genuine as opposed to token participation of students in decision making, according to Brown et al. (2020, p. 93). Brown et al. (2020) posit that SSE, which now includes students’ and parents’ participation, has moved schools in Ireland up from Level 3 on Hart’s Ladder (1992), which represents tokenistic involvement, to Level 5, which represents consulted and informed involvement of said parents and students; this suggests a movement from non-participation to participation in the decision-making process in schools. This means that students and parents now have a voice in the external inspection process; this happens through questionnaires, classroom visits to students by inspectors, and focus-group interviews with parents, which are mandated in official policy. Furthermore, students now have a voice in the SSE process, which may take the form of questionnaires and/or focus-group interviews. Brown et al. (2020, p. 85) argue that this participation has been positively received in schools in Ireland, due to the ‘improvement-focused education environment’. Hart (2020) subsequently suggested that the ladder was a representation of a plan or theory in the form an

outline or model. He offered it as a useful means to bring a critical perspective on a subject – in this case, the participation of students in decision-making in school.

It is argued in the literature that much more work is needed by principals and deputy principals in schools to facilitate students to be actively engaged in the decision-making process of schooling (Faddar et al., 2021). Students are uncertain at best that they are major stakeholders in the school, and therefore need to be informed of their right to take ownership of the internal standards of their school.

Brown et al. (2020, p. 89) have identified that some authors such as Flutter (2007), and also Whitty and Whisby (2007), are wary about the benefits of student voice, and fear that the impact of student voice may diminish the voice of the teacher. Faddar et al. (2021) posit that some staff feel threatened by student voice, which in turn can lead to resistance or reluctance to foster inclusion of student voice. Despite these fears, Brown et al. (2020, p. 99) found that ‘SSE is seen more as an improvement rather than an accountability mechanism’. On the other hand, Brown et al. (2021, pp.160-167) maintain that parent and student engagement remains ‘aspirational’ to a large extent and is even ‘peripheral’, despite involvement through questionnaires and focus-group interviews.

Brown et al. (2021, pp. 169-170) identified the societal barriers to such involvement, namely, the fact that parents and students are busy; they lack capacity to take on such a role; there are resource implications. Furthermore, there are cultural barriers; namely, the extent to which ‘students and parents are traditionally isolated from decision-making processes’; therefore, there is a rhetoric/reality gap. Brown et al. (2021, p.171) suggest that the way to overcome this cultural barrier is to recognise that ‘parents and students are in fact partners who have a right

to full involvement and may bring a lot to the table if invited.’ Faddar et al. (2021) suggest that future research should focus on parent and student voice in SSE, with a focus on examining how they see their own role.

On the one hand, Faddar et al. (2021) contend that the challenges of including student and parent voice in SSE ‘exceed the capacity of an individual school leader to overcome them’. On the other hand, this present study found many examples of the inclusion of student voice, as itemised in the Table entitled ‘Student Voice’ further on in this section. Faddar et al. (2021, p.10) found that for ‘the inclusion of parent and student voice, providing resources and training at the school level for stakeholders should be considered absolutely necessary’ and this would then lead on to ‘more effective and valuable participation’ by both parents and students.

Brown et al. (2021) contend that student engagement is merely aspirational; however, the findings of the present study reveal that student involvement in policy making via surveys and focus groups can lead to real educational change. An example of this includes student input into the homework-and-assessment policy. The survey on homework post September 2005 revealed that students believed written homework was the only kind of real homework; they did not see oral work or reading or revision as real homework. This led to a rationale and explanation of homework being written into the actual homework policy, giving equal weight to all the different types of homework. Furthermore, students asked for more feedback on their homework, and this then became school policy. The consultation regarding feedback was management-level consultation, student-level consultation and teacher-level consultation. The findings in this study revealed that the vast majority of teachers gave effective feedback to their students on how students can improve, and this is consistent with the literature (Redmond, 2021). The students were aware that this was school policy so in effect, and nothing less would

suffice. In sum, student voice had a significant impact on changing school policy and practice regarding this issue, thereby effecting educational change. This concurs with research by Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara (2021).

Skerritt, O'Hara and Brown (2021) differentiate between management-level consultation and teacher-level consultation in relation to student voice. An example of the former is where the principal alone seeks student voice without any mediation by teachers; this was done in the present school in what is referred to as an 'Exit Survey'. An exit survey involved the principal alone administering surveys, collecting surveys and collating the data of surveys of sixth-year students in their last week in school re: Teaching and Learning; Leadership and Management; School Climate. An example of an outcome of the exit survey was the introduction of block study for sixth-year students for the last few weeks of the school year. Students were usually sent home in the middle of May to study at home. The exit survey revealed that students were very unhappy with this policy; therefore, block study was introduced immediately so that while the rest of the school carried on with summer exams and classes, the sixth years could attend block-study sessions. The students were very pleased with this change. It is an example of school improvement that resulted from student voice.

A second example of management-level consultation occurred due to management's open-door policy; students informed the principal that they were unhappy with the timing of Christmas examinations and results of same. This led to Christmas examinations being re-scheduled to November, which allowed time for corrections and results of exams to be issued. Each teacher corrected their own class papers; then a sample from each class was appraised by a colleague to ensure consistency in the marking scheme. This use of triangulation was a further layer of accountability in the process, as well as being an example of professional dialogue. The

advantage of sitting the examinations in November was that students were then able to revise during the holidays for their mock examinations in February. The tracking of results showed an incremental improvement in academic results. This is therefore a further example of school improvement that resulted from student voice.

Teacher-level consultation in relation to student voice refers to teachers seeking to hear students' views themselves. Examples of this are seen where teachers carry out surveys in a verbal or written format, sometimes as part of the SSE process and sometimes on a more informal basis, to seek feedback on their own teaching. (Brown et al., 2021; Faddar et al., 2021; Skerritt, O'Hara and Brown, 2021). Teachers frequently asked students in this school for feedback on their teaching methodologies; the students are very well-educated about methodologies, as the whole school is aware of the importance of student input in his/ her learning. Student voice has had a significant impact on teaching practice in this school, as students are very much part of the decision-making regarding teaching and learning in the classroom, as is the students' right.

Skerritt, O'Hara and Brown (2021) maintain that context is crucial when examining the role of student voice in a school. The context of the present school is as follows: it is a post-primary school; it is co-educational; it has a religious ethos, and is governed by trustees; it has had two lay principals spanning almost three decades; it is rural; it is not designated disadvantaged and it is not fee-paying; there is a mixed socio-economic composition of students; there is a variety in age groups and experience among the teachers; the quality of relationships between students and teachers is seen as crucial.

Skerritt, Brown and O’Hara (2021) argue that religious-run schools are less inclusive of student voice than other schools, such as ETB schools, which they perceive to be more democratic. This researcher argues that the school which is the focus of the present study was inclusive of student voice; the following table itemises the many ways in which students get an opportunity to be heard:

Student Voice	
Student Council	One representative for each class group, therefore several representatives for each year group; POR holder in charge; student council representatives then met the principal/deputy principal to discuss issues arising from their student-council meetings. Their opinions were highly valued. Changes did take place as a result of student suggestions/ views.
Senior Prefect Programme	Sixth-year students mentored first-year students re pastoral care/Buddy Programme. This was a forum for first years to offer their views and opinions; these views and opinions were fed back to the senior management team.
SSE Surveys/Questionnaires focusing on Student Voice	Seven SSE groups run by teachers surveyed students re: various school policies, such as homework-and-assessment policy; anti-bullying policy; literacy policy; ICT policy.
Exit Survey	Principal alone administered and collected surveys of sixth-year students in their last week in school re: Teaching and Learning; Leadership and Management; School Climate; with aim of using findings for school improvement.
Open Door Policy	Students could email principal directly with any queries or could request a meeting with principal to discuss any issue at lunchtime or after school without an appointment. Requests to meet with students were never refused.
Head Boy and Head Girl and their Deputies	These students met with the principal/deputy principal to discuss any issue in an open and frank way. They had a platform to speak at various school events.

External School Inspection	Students are surveyed, interviewed and have classroom interaction with inspectors during inspections.
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The findings regarding student voice in this study are very interesting. One quarter of the students surveyed in this school did not consider that they had a say in how things were done, while just over a third did consider that they had a say in how things were done in this school. in the New Regime. I view this latter percentage as being low and therefore consider that a dialogue on what constitutes student voice would be appropriate in a further study. It is notable that the above student-survey results are contrary to the same student-survey results, in that a total of 81.1% of students indicated that teachers always or usually listen to them and pay attention to what they say. Perhaps one way to interpret these apparently contradictory results would be to suggest that students feel their voice is heard loudly and clearly by teachers in the classroom, but perhaps not so much by management or in the wider school environment. It is further worth noting that interview findings reveal that one teacher perceived that the students know that they have a voice in this school and are well able to use it. This teacher goes on to say that student voice informs decisions in this school.

5.10 School Climate in a School with a Religious School Ethos

The literature emphasises the importance of core values (Bezzina, 2012), and the findings show that the overwhelming majority of teachers believed that the core religious values of the school were implemented in the day-to-day running of this school. One teacher stated in an interview that the ethos of the school underpinned the interactions between students and teachers. Another teacher suggested that the religious ethos created a just and fair school culture. A student claimed in an interview that the religious ethos meant that there is a place for everyone in the school, including those students ‘who do not conventionally fit in’.

As principal, I considered that our religious ethos meant that we lived our lives in school trying to live up to the moral code of doing the right thing. This is consistent with the literature (Bezzina, 2012; Fullan et al., 2005). The religious ethos in our school showed us the way of treating all members of our school with care and respect. This was a significant change in our school, and was greatly helped by the collaboration of all members of our school community, including management, students, teachers, ancillary staff, parents and the board of management. It is worth noting that ‘the critical issue is not so much having one set of values that would apply to all schools, but rather that in any given school there is an explicit and owned value platform’ (Bezzina, 2012, p. 252).

5.11 Key Driver of Educational Change 2: Building Capacity

The second key driver of educational change, building capacity, involves ‘policies, strategies, resources and actions’ (Fullan, et al., 2005), which foster effective collaboration amongst the entire school community in the pursuit of change. This change must be on-going and be part of a new culture of work that incorporates ‘developing new knowledge, skills, and competencies’ (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 55). The example that Fullan et al. (2005, p. 55) refer to is Information and Communication Technology (ICT); ‘not only must educators acquire new knowledge and understandings, they must integrate technology into curriculum, teaching, learning and assessing learning’. The findings from the present study reveal that the teachers overwhelmingly stated that they used ICT regularly in their classes. Therefore, it is evident that the teachers use ICT as a pedagogical tool.

New technology was introduced into this school during the New Regime, starting with Smart Boards and teacher iPadsTM, and then a suite of hundreds of iPads for student use. The findings show that when the global pandemic (2020) emerged, ICT was placed front and centre as the

primary teaching methodology. The teachers with ICT skills taught new skills over Zoom to other teachers who did not previously have the necessary skills to deliver online lessons from home. This situation did not go unnoticed by students; they opined that teachers learned to use different methodologies using ICT very quickly. Indeed, they mentioned that many teachers now used ‘the flipped classroom’ and You-tube videos as part of their methodology repertoire. The flipped classroom facilitates higher-order thinking in class, as the students have watched the lesson on-line (called a pre-lecture) before discussing it in class the next day (Seery, 2015). In addition, other teachers used voice notes for providing feedback, which enabled students to note the intonation of the teacher, and which students liked instead of written feedback. Sometimes the voice feedback lasted for ten minutes, which Student D described as ‘real (in)-depth feedback with everything in it’.

These findings show that capacity building had been given a major focus in this school, which in turn helped to foster a culture of educational change. This was understood by the school community to have led to school improvement. This concurs with the literature, which shows the importance of improving teachers’ skillset, for example in the area of ICT, as found in the research by O’Brien et al. (2017; 2019), who describe the necessity of teachers learning research skills in order to carry out SSE effectively.

There are many other areas in which capacity building is necessary. It occurs in both formal and informal ways in schools; this is now being recognised by the Teaching Council who published *Cosán* (2016), the first national framework for teachers’ professional learning in Ireland, ‘within which the rich variety of teachers’ learning can be recognised’ (Ó Ruairc, 2019). Furthermore, according to Moynihan and O’Donovan (2021, p. 4), ‘collaboration is a core element of teacher capacity building’; this is because it ‘pools teachers’ knowledge and

expertise by providing opportunities for teachers to work together'. The aim of teacher collaboration is to enhance student academic outcomes. There can be no school improvement without genuine teacher collaboration.

5.12 Key Driver of Educational Change 3: Understanding the Change Process

The third key driver of educational change is understanding the change process. According to Fullan et al. (2005, p. 55), 'the change process is about establishing the condition for continuous improvement in order to persist and overcome inevitable barriers to reform'. According to Fullan et al. (2005, p. 55), 'making change work requires the energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership of all those implementing improvements'. Shared vision and ownership are the outcomes of 'a quality change process'; they are not in existence at the beginning of the change process.

The implementation of educational change in this school was not without challenges, in the form of resistance from some staff, who found the change both daunting and professionally difficult. The old practices in many aspects of schooling had to come to an end. The reinstatement of discipline and the necessity to increase academic outcomes led to a certain amount of resistance. Some staff found it easier to adapt to change; it is worth noting that this was not related to years of experience in the school. Others found the process of change too difficult in terms of radical changes demanded in practice. In time, sufficient numbers embraced the need for radical change, and therefore there was the critical mass who were happy to implement and enact change. The principal as change agent can benefit from regarding some resistance as the voice of engaged and committed staff, whose initial resistance may be used to further clarify 'the objectives and strategies at the heart of a change proposal', according to

Ford and Ford (2010, p. 34). This type of resistance may then be regarded as valuable feedback, which ultimately aids in the implementation of change.

The principal is an agent of change who must understand that the change process will encounter an 'implementation dip', which refers to the 'inevitable early difficulties of trying something new' (Fullan, 2002, p. 18). Such a dip was encountered when implementing the recommended Post of Responsibility (POR) review; it was not plain sailing and required the passage of time before the review was successfully completed. The WSE (2005) had recommended that the discipline system be overhauled and they suggested using tutors; however the principal and staff felt that Post of Responsibility holders, as year heads, should take on the responsibility for discipline. In the findings of this study, in the New Regime, the vast majority of staff agreed that the middle-management structure (Post of Responsibility post holders) was effective.

A second instance of the implementation dip occurred in the early years of the New Regime in relation to parent/teacher meetings, when attendance remained very low despite the senior management team and staff trying new initiatives to improve attendance. According to Islam (2019), parents can play an important role in their children's overall education both at home and in school; this belief was at the heart of the senior management and staff initiatives to improve attendance at parent-teacher meetings in the school. Parent-teacher interactions may also, according to Kremer et al. (2013), improve accountability and transparency on the part of parents and teachers. Wilder (2014) opines that regarding parental involvement, the relationship is strongest if parental involvement includes parental expectations for the academic achievement of their children. Hastings and Weinstein (2008) have demonstrated that an increase in parental involvement in their children's learning is generally associated with better grades, test scores and attendance, as well as increased motivation on the part of students to

attain better academic results. This was at the core of what this school was trying to achieve. After four years of attempts to facilitate improvement in attendance by parents, by changing the time and days of the parent-teacher meetings and also by facilitating a phone call to parents who could not attend, the situation did improve greatly. The findings in this study suggest that the overwhelming majority of parents are now very pleased with the format of parent-teacher meetings.

Changing the culture of the school to one where all teachers and management work together to implement change is what creates lasting change, according to the literature. This is termed 're-culturing' and it has no 'shortcut to transformation'; rather 'it involves hard day-to-day work' (Fullan, 2002, p. 18). This became possible in the school in this study thanks to the blueprint for educational change provided by the inspectors. Fullan (2002, p. 18) refers to the principal involved in such a process as a 'cultural change principal', and this is reflected in the findings. As one parent noted,

'and so it slowly changed, the principal had to change the culture, it took time but it was perceived that she succeeded'.

A major aspect of the change process is building relationships and teams (Fullan et al., 2005). This became possible as, from the very beginning, on reading the inspection report of WSE (2005), it became obvious that relationships needed to be built within the staff to form a school-improvement group/team to work on the implementation of the WSE (2005) recommendations. This group was very effective in that it was committed to school improvement and was very goal-focussed. This group worked over a number of years outside of school time, to implement the recommendations of the WSE (2005), and to sustain continuous improvement. This group changed the culture of collaboration and aided in building relationships in the school. This

culture of collaboration was embedded in the school and in future years, this led on to the development of seven working groups, as itemised in the WSE-MLL (2015) report. This culture of collaboration is consistent with the literature (OECD, 2009; Fullan et al., 2005). This use of distributed leadership was of immense benefit in turning this school around, and in providing interventions that supported the recommendations following all three whole-school inspection reports. Building relationships and teams in this manner is in line with a strong understanding of the change process, and it concurs with the literature on educational change (Fullan et al., 2005) and on distributed leadership (Harris and Jones, 2019; Donohoo, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006).

5.13 Key Driver of Educational Change 4: Developing Cultures for Learning

Fullan et al.'s (2005) fourth key driver of educational change is called Developing Cultures for Learning. This key driver for educational change refers to people being 'collectively committed to improvement' (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 54). The overwhelming majority of teachers surveyed in this study collaborated with each other for the purposes of school improvement. This involved engaging in professional dialogue and sharing best practice (Moynihan and O'Donovan, 2021). Research by Moynihan and O'Donovan (2021, p. 9) found that 'subject departments are to the fore in building collaborative cultures in respect of discussing and evaluating teaching and learning in supportive and collectively responsible teams.' This collaborative process was carried out in the present school at subject-department meetings and at general staff meetings, where time was allocated to the whole staff to showcase new methodologies and pedagogy arising from Instructional Leadership. Other examples include Classroom Based Assessments (CBA) and Subject Learning and Assessment Reviews (SLAR) connected to the new Junior Cycle being discussed at subject-department meetings.

The staff in this school were collectively committed to improvement and this was borne out in the findings and concurs with the literature on school improvement (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2012; DES, 2022). It should be noted that this is in stark contrast with the situation in which there was little or no collaboration reported in WSE (2005). Teachers in the New Regime learned to effectively work together as opposed to being solitary in their classrooms as in the Old Regime. Moynihan and O'Donovan (2021, p. 15) refer to the latter state of affairs as reflecting an 'historic isolationist and insular culture', and further contend that true teacher collaboration is an attempt to loosen the chains of that past. Byrne (2016) refers to the reluctance felt by some teachers regarding sharing ideas and collaborating. However, as with all significant educational change, as outlined by Fullan et al. (2005, p. 54), some people adapted to the new way of working very quickly and effortlessly, while others exhibited some reluctance (Byrne, 2016). The principal, according to Fullan et al. (2005), is a key agent of change in developing the new culture for learning, by providing time and space for this teacher collaboration to take place (Moynihan and O'Donovan, 2021).

The findings also reveal how teaching and learning were impacted positively through planning structures such as the subject-department meetings, as per the recommendations of the inspectors, where teachers engage in professional dialogue and thereby show that they are collectively committed to improvement. This concurs with Hislop's views (2020). An example of collective agreement on improvement was the implementation of setting common papers and common marking schemes for in-house examinations in this school. This professional intervention led to improved student outcomes over time.

Parents in this school, as partners in education, were also collectively committed to improvement and were actively involved in, and consulted about, their child's education. For

instance, the findings of the parents' survey show that the vast majority agreed that they received helpful advice from this school when their child was choosing subjects. The importance of involving parents in their child's education is explained in the literature (Dillon, 2011; Brown et al., 2021). These researchers and many others posit that stakeholder voice should not be limited to tokenism (Dillon, 2011; Brown et al., 2021; Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara, 2021; Faddar et al., 2021).

This key driver for educational change also involves people learning from each other; for instance, learning from colleagues using peer observation. The uptake of using peer observation was satisfactory. There were members of staff who felt comfortable about using peer observation as a pedagogical tool, but others remained unsure. This is an understandable reaction. It is hoped that more staff members will participate into the future. Instructional leadership provided teachers with a toolbox of teaching methodologies, which included the use of Bloom's Taxonomy; Think, Pair, Share; Mind Maps; Group Work; and Higher and Lower Order Questioning (Bennett et al., 1991; Bennett and Rolheiser, 2001). The teachers who had previously attended CPD on instructional leadership invited (there was no compulsion) other teachers to engage in peer observation, to see these various methodologies being implemented in the classroom setting. The findings in this study suggest that new teachers became aware of these methodologies being used in the classroom. As one teacher observed:

'As I walked around the school, I noticed that teachers were using certain methodologies which were new to me, when asked, the teachers were very well able to explain what they were doing, all pertaining to instructional leadership. You could see it in their teaching'.

Students were very well versed in the methodologies of instructional leadership, as is evidenced in the findings.

5.14 Key Driver of Educational Change 5 (i): Cultures of Evaluation

Introduction

The fifth key driver of educational change is Developing Cultures of Evaluation. An important aspect of evaluation cultures includes ‘school based self-appraisal’, which in turn can be used for internal accountability purposes (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 56).

There are two sections described here: Section 1 is concerned with internal accountability (further sub-divided into 1A and 1B) and Section 2 is concerned with external accountability.

5.15 Section 1A: Internal Accountability

This section deals with internal accountability. It refers to the inspectors’ WSE (2005) report recommendation that a school plan be formulated. The 1998 Education Act made the school plan a statutory requirement.

I will firstly describe the internal accountability processes in this school as a result of the WSE (2005). The sub-headings for this Section 1A are as follows: School Plan/Change of Levels and Mixed Ability/Homework and Assessment Policy. In Section 1B, I will then describe the SSE process, which became mandatory and prescriptive in 2012, and which relates to the WSE-MLL (2015) and the FTI (2018). The sub-headings for this section are as follows: Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011); mandatory and prescriptive SSE; positives and negatives of SSE; SSE in WSE-MLL (2015) and SSE in FTI (2018).

According to Simons (2013), it is the internal evaluation of school practices that provides insights into the educational experiences of students. SSE is a relatively new policy in Ireland. McNamara et al. (2022) suggest that schools engage with SSE in an inconsistent fashion. This inconsistency caused Brown et al. (2020) to suggest that changes in educational policy do not always produce changes in practice. There are many reasons put forward by schools why SSE has not been implemented in a manner that the Inspectorate envisaged. Firstly, some schools suggest that the training was not sufficient and that as a result, they lacked capacity in engaging with SSE properly. Other schools suggest that Irish schools are suffering from initiative overload, at a time when curricular changes in the Junior Certificate were taking place, which necessitated major reforms in the use of methodologies and assessment.

Chapman and Simons (2013) suggest that SSE is used to generate personal and professional development and school improvement. Self-evaluation suggests that schools monitor their own practices and standards; this is not the case in Ireland as the standards and criteria are produced and imposed by the Irish Inspectorate (LAOS, 2022). McNamara et al. (2022) consider that SSE was introduced as a policy because of the perceived need by the Inspectorate and indeed perhaps society at large for more accountability. They also suggest that SSE fulfills the drive of the Inspectorate towards self-managing schools (McNamara et al., 2022). Perhaps there is a need for more consultation with schools when the next iteration of SSE is muted.

5.16 School Plan/Change of Levels and Mixed Ability

The impetus for a change of the culture of evaluation in this school came from the WSE (2005) report, which signalled an urgent need to reassess previous unsound educational practices, such as streaming. Hattie (2008) claimed that the effects on equity are profound and negative. No school wants to be identified as being an inequitable institution. The rationale for streaming is

that students of similar ability can learn at their own pace; however, according to Johnston and Wildy (2016), the history of research into streaming suggests that it does not improve academic outcomes for most students. Streaming at twelve years of age presupposes that intellectual ability is formed at such a young age, and that might be an unreasonable assumption.

As already outlined, a school-improvement team was formed consisting of myself as principal and six teachers who volunteered their time. This core group discussed the implementation of the WSE (2005) recommendations; the first priority was the inspectors' recommendation to abolish streaming. Consultation was the next step, as the core group was mindful of the fact that a certain number of staff had always been – and still were at that time – in favour of streaming. This concurs with the literature; Dillon (2011) found in her study that certain teachers were 'dismissive of Inspectorate recommendations about teaching and learning'. However, the vast majority of staff in this school in the present study were in favour of abolishing streaming; they agreed with the inspectors' view that mixed-ability classes were educationally sound, as conveyed in the WSE (2005) report, which acted as the impetus for change.

Another example of internal accountability is that the entrance examinations in the Old Regime were not uniformly standardised tests; from 2006 (New Regime) onwards, the entrance examinations were all standardised tests. As a result of a review undertaken in the school, there was a change of culture, which led to a fairer system of allocating students to mixed-ability classes. Valiandes (2015, p.17) opines that 'modern societies call for democratization in all sectors of human life', and thus stresses the need for a more egalitarian education system. Differentiation, not streaming, is therefore the better pedagogical choice. This concurs with the literature, which outlines the benefits of a mixed-ability system (Smyth and McCoy, 2011). As

a result of the above process, all students in this school were now mandated to sit higher-level papers unless there was a valid reason for taking ordinary level; a change in level necessitated the teacher completing a form, as well as the student and the teacher having a meeting with the principal.

This intervention came about as a result of the inspectors noticing during class visits in 2005 that students in the lower streams were not reaching their academic potential, as they were misplaced and had much more ability than their allocation to a low-stream class suggested. The new system is conveyed in the interview findings by Teacher M:

'if they asked to do ordinary level ... there was a little bit of form filling, contacting parents ... as a class teacher you either decide you want to do all that paperwork or ... we just all do higher level'.

Sitting higher-level papers in the school became part of the school culture. This led to higher expectations on the part of both teachers and students, and ultimately led to improved student outcomes. Another reason for improved student outcomes was the introduction of a homework-and-assessment policy.

5.17 Homework and Assessment Policy

The Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015, p. 35) stated that 'the greatest benefits for students' learning occur when teachers provide effective feedback to students that helps them to understand how their learning can be improved'. In the Old Regime, feedback from teachers on students' work was evident but not universal, according to the WSE (2005) report. A change in evaluation culture was brought about in the New Regime, with the first step being to introduce a new homework policy, which was a collaboration between students, teachers and

parents. Pfeiffer (2018) contends that the commitment to giving homework (as opposed to a no-homework policy) logically requires the establishment of a clearly defined school policy. Findings in this study indicated that the vast majority of students stated that their homework was always or usually corrected. Findings also show that parents were very satisfied with the amount of homework assigned to their children. This is a vast improvement; however, work is ongoing to persuade teachers who do not give sufficient homework that setting homework is essential for student learning. ‘Homework can yield a considerable increase in academic performance’ at post-primary level (Cooper, 1994, p. 10). Research by Redmond (2021, pp.68-69) found that ‘homework is an important part of a student’s learning process’. Pfeiffer (2018, p. 7) argues that ‘the most important advantage of homework is that it can enhance achievement by extending learning beyond the school day’.

In recent years, there was a new emphasis on feedback that incorporated formative assessment. This concurs with the literature (Black and Wiliam, 1998; NCCA, 2008; Burner, 2018). Findings from the present study revealed that feedback played an important role for students, who were well-versed in the educational benefits of feedback.

5.18 Section 1B: School Self Evaluation – Internal Accountability

A concise definition of SSE was presented by the DES in the SSE Guidelines (2016, p. 6):

School self-evaluation empowers a school community to identify and affirm good practice, and to identify and take action on areas that merit improvement. School self-evaluation is primarily about schools taking ownership of their own development and improvement.

The guidelines (DES, 2016) further explain that SSE is the follow-on from the school-plan process.

The sub-headings for this Section 1B are as follows: Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) and SSE; Positives and Negatives of SSE; Recommendations re: SSE.

5.19 Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) and Mandatory SSE

The literature shows that the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011a) resulted from the disappointing PISA 2009 results in Ireland (Hislop, 2012). This Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) was a clear example of educational change being implemented on a national scale (DES, 2011a). A further educational change occurred when SSE became mandatory in schools in Ireland in 2012 (SSE, 2012). Furthermore, SSE became prescriptive, and schools were told to focus on setting targets to improve literacy and numeracy as part of their school-improvement agenda (DES, 2011a). One of the main elements of SSE was its focus on ‘internal accountability purposes’, to use Fullan et al.’s term (2005, p. 56).

5.20 Positives and Negatives of SSE

Brown et al. (2017) contend that negatives associated with implementing SSE include the inordinate amount of time required to implement SSE; increased workload and resultant stress; and the lack of capacity in research skills on the part of teachers and principals. On the other hand, Brown et al. (2017) describe the positives associated with SSE, namely, increased distributed leadership, more collaboration, collegiality and professional dialogue. McNamara et al. (2022) suggest that although there is a school-improvement agenda attached to SSE, there is also an accountability-and-economic logic. External inspections are very costly, according to the Inspectorate (Hislop, 2012), which is why shorter forms of external inspection were

introduced in order to give greater coverage at less expense. A lack of training in areas such as research skills contributed to the inconsistent implementation of SSE in schools; therefore, perhaps, this economic logic is counter-productive. Perhaps in the next iteration of SSE, there needs to be more consultation with schools to improve the process and outcome.

5.21 Recommendations re: SSE

The WSE-MLL (2015) recommended the formation of staff working groups; the FTI (2018) report itemised the seven staff working groups that had been formed as a direct result of the WSE-MLL (2015) recommendation. These seven-teacher professional-planning groups are clear examples of distributed leadership (see table).

Teacher Professional Planning Groups formed as a result of WSE-MLL (2015) recommendations by the inspectors. These groups were noted in the F.T.I. of 2018.
1. Numeracy
2. Literacy
3. Assessment
4. Information Communication Technology (ICT)
5. Instructional Leadership
6. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
7. School Climate

Each group followed the SSE process, which involves gathering data, analysing data and making judgements, creating an action plan, setting targets, and evaluating the impact of the action plan. This echoes Fullan et al.'s (2005) 'culture of evaluation', which involves gathering data, disaggregating data, and writing action plans based on said data.

Brown et al. (2017) found that a minority of principals in their study believed that focusing on literacy and numeracy was too prescriptive; on the other hand, the majority of participants

found this focus on literacy and numeracy led to measurable improvements in achievement. The findings in this present study indicate that the vast majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that School Self Evaluation was used in this school to improve students' learning. The introduction of SSE in this school has allowed students to use their voice in relation to improving their learning; this is consistent with the literature on SSE and student voice (Faddar et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2021; Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara, 2021). Students are also actively encouraged by senior management and staff in this school to use their voice to improve the policies and practices of the school.

5.22 Key Driver of Educational Change 5(ii) Cultures of Evaluation: External Accountability – School Inspections

According to Ehren et al. (2013), school inspections can be used to probe and explore the current state of schools, according to specific quality criteria set down by the Inspectorate. Gartner and Pant (2011) agree, suggesting that school inspections are expected to effectively promote school improvement. Gustaffson et al. (2015) further opine that school inspections hold schools to account for a broad range of goals, which are all related to student outcomes, teaching, organisation and leadership. They suggest that the ultimate purpose of school inspections is to improve schools in terms of the experience and performance of learners (Gustaffson et al., 2015). All of these attributes of effective inspection were evident in the whole-school inspection reports that were carried out in this school. Ehren et al. (2015) argue that to make inspection work in the overall system, improvement of educational quality is better thought of as a culture change. A culture change took place in this school in the aftermath of inspections, as the recommendations of the inspection reports provided a roadmap for change in this school.

The fifth key driver of educational change is developing cultures of evaluation. An important aspect of evaluation cultures includes ‘meaningful use of external accountability data’ (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 56). Here in Section 2, I will describe the meaningful use that this school made of the external-accountability data provided in the inspection reports under the following headings: Blueprint for Educational Change; Accountability. The findings under these headings refer to the New Regime. The findings emanate from the meaningful use of the recommendations made in all three inspection reports.

5.23 Blueprint for Educational Change

The literature (Dillon, 2011; Brown, 2013; Griffin, 2010; Mathews, 2010) reveals that WSE provides a blueprint for future action. This concurs with the major finding of this present study. Dillon (2011, p. 114) revealed that principals found that ‘inspection enhanced their role as educational leaders in their schools and thus served their interests to a point’. Dillon’s (2011) finding concurs with the overwhelming finding in the present study, which indicate that the principal became a more effective agent of change when cloaked in the armour of external evaluation. The blueprint consisted of all the recommendations made by the inspectors during their evaluations of this school. The blueprint was a catalyst for ‘meaningful use of external accountability data’ (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 56).

However, Dillon (2011) argues that the enhanced role of the leader as described above does not outweigh the negative aspects of WSE; for instance, the fact that principals made choices about which recommendations to implement, citing lack of resources, time and expertise as issues to consider. It is worth highlighting that in the school in this present study, all recommendations were implemented and enacted; however, it should be noted that one recommendation was reassigned to year heads by the principal, rather than to tutors, as

suggested by the inspectors. This was the sole recommendation that was not followed; it should be noted, though, that all recommendations were not blindly followed. All other recommendations were, however, followed because they were legitimate.

A positive outcome of the WSE (2005) in this school was that the majority of teachers saw the immediate need for change, as in particular the shortcomings in academic achievement and discipline were cited as being in need of immediate improvement. There was a general acceptance by all that the Education Act of 1998 placed a statutory responsibility on the Inspectorate to evaluate the quality and standards of schools in Ireland.

Change was by no means easy for the staff, but in general the staff were accepting of the recommendations of the WSE (2005). Many meetings took place between staff and the principal to provide a roadmap for improvement. Small incremental steps in improvement were celebrated by both parties, but the need for continuous ongoing systemic improvement was recognised, in order to provide the students with a quality education and to keep the school open.

On the one hand, Dillon (2011, p. 117) argues that the blueprint provides ‘direction and leverage for school leadership’ in establishing an ongoing school improvement agenda; on the other hand she finds that the resultant school improvement is short term in nature. However, the findings of the present study span 16 years of school improvement; they therefore cannot be considered short term, and hence they are contrary to Dillon’s (2011) findings. Dillon’s (2011, p. 118) research revealed that the majority of teachers in her study believed that WSE ‘had not brought about any changes to their professional practice’. This is contrary to the findings of the present study, as the vast majority of teachers in this study believed that the

recommendations in the WSE reports (2005, 2015, 2018) had brought many changes to their professional practice; for example, teachers in the school now collaborate well and share good practice. There were many changes to professional practice, for instance, in the areas of school planning, professional development and the subject departments structure as a result of the recommendations of WSE reports (2005, 2015, 2018). This is consistent with the literature (Moynihan and O'Donovan, 2021).

5.24 Accountability

Anderson and Planning (2005) suggest that educators work within three types of accountability systems in external inspection, often at the same time. The first is the compliance-oriented system, where they are held accountable for adherence to the mandated rules in the form of circular letters send out by the Department of Education. An example of this was when the WSE (2005) found that the length of the school day did not meet regulatory requirements, being some hours short; action was taken immediately to remedy this situation; WSE-MLL (2015) found that the school was short of instruction by several minutes and this was rectified immediately.

The second type of accountability system is the professional accountability system where educators are held accountable for their teaching. WSE (2005) argued for the need for an increased repertoire of teaching methodologies in the school; this was achieved incrementally through attendance at continuous professional development (CPD) on instructional leadership and other in-service provided by the Department of Education in later years. This is evidenced in the findings in this study, when teachers state that continuous professional development is strongly encouraged by senior management in this school. Indeed, attendance at all in-service is part of the core educational values of this school. In-service is not an à-la-carte feature of a

teacher's professional life, according to the literature (Moynihan and O'Donovan, 2021); it is a compulsory necessity. On the other hand, the negative side of external accountability in relation to teaching is the stress occasioned by external inspection; this is described in the literature by Ball (2003), Sugrue (2006), and Skerritt (2020). However, one could argue that maintaining the status quo in this school would have occasioned a different type of stress, because school closure was imminent without robust educational change.

The third type of accountability system is performance-based accountability, where educators are accountable for student learning and outcomes to the public. WSE (2005) revealed the deficits in student learning due to the inordinate number of students who sat ordinary-level papers in the State examinations; this was rectified by consensus which resulted in all students attempting higher-level papers, which was made possible due to the introduction of mixed-ability classes. This in turn led to improved student outcomes, as reflected in the marked increase in the progression rates to third-level institutions. These findings are evidenced in the teachers' views, an example of one being:

'The students did higher level subjects and the teachers were under pressure to get good results. Big changes were happening'.

A teacher who worked in the school both during the Old Regime and the New Regime remembered the Old Regime when *'they could do ordinary level, if they wanted to'*, but in New Regime *'that all changed, that was gone'*. The above examples indicate that the findings concur with the literature, as expressed by Ehren and Visscher (2006, p. 52), who assert that *'accountability is considered to serve improvement, as being accountable implies that some improving action will follow in cases of underperformance'*. The improving actions that occurred emanated from the blueprint of the recommendations of all three inspections. Without

the ‘meaningful use of external accountability data’ (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 56), sound educational change would not have occurred. This external accountability data pertaining to this study was provided by the inspectors in their three reports, and without this documentation, sound educational change would not have occurred. This positive change is therefore a testament to the Inspectorate.

5.25 Key Driver of Educational Change 6: Leadership for Change

The sixth key driver of educational change is called Leadership for Change. Fullan et al. (2005, p. 57) state categorically that ‘there is no other driver as essential as leadership for sustainable reform’. Specifically, they advocate distributed leadership, which is leadership that is shared among many leaders in the school. The literature on distributed leadership refers to multiple leaders in a school (Spillane, Halverston and Diamond, 2004; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Fullan and Hargreaves, 2016). In the WSE-MLL (2015), inspectors recognised and itemised the creation of seven working groups operating in the school at that time, which is notable evidence of distributed leadership. These groups worked on aspects of school improvement, which included the following: literacy, numeracy, assessment, ICT, school climate, RSE, and instructional leadership.

The creation of these seven working groups is a significant marker of leadership for change; in 2005 there were no such groups. As already discussed, the first group was formed in October 2005 in the New Regime by volunteers who gave up their free time to work with the principal to discuss ways to implement the inspectors’ recommendations as outlined in the WSE (2005) report. The members of this School Improvement Team went on over the coming years to become distributed leaders, who in turn contributed to the aforementioned seven working groups. This concurs with Fullan et al. (2005), who describe how the best legacy of a leader is

how many other leaders have been created to carry on the work when the original leader leaves their position.

However, to be effective, distributed leadership relies on certain individual teachers having the competencies necessary to lead and to drive instruction within the school (Leithwood et al., 2007). Marks and Printy (2003) suggest that teachers do indeed have the capacity and willingness to lead, and they disagree with the view of Leithwood and Jantzi (1999, p. 393), who state that ‘adding the notion of leadership to teaching does a disservice to both teachers and leaders.’ The opposite was revealed to be the case in this school, as the interview findings show that the teachers do indeed appreciate the opportunity to become distributed leaders, as they wished to drive school improvement. Furthermore, to be effective, according to Leithwood et al. (2008), distributed leadership relies on the principal creating a culture in the school which is conducive to empowering teachers as leaders. In the findings in this study, a teacher opined:

‘There are an awful lot of opportunities afforded to us as a staff because of school management giving us opportunities to lead and drive school improvement.’

Mintzberg (2004, pp. 16-39) says that the most significant aspect of distributed leaders is ‘what they do to enhance the decision-making capabilities of others’ (cited in Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). This concurs with the findings in the teacher survey, which reveals that over three-quarters of the teachers stated that they are included in the decision-making process in this school. The focus of the decisions made was always about implementing positive educational change, school effectiveness and school improvement to enhance the quality of education on offer to our students, following the blueprint for educational change furnished by the WSE inspectors in their reports.

5.26 Key Driver of Educational Change 7: Coherence Making

The seventh driver of educational change is fostering coherence making. Fullan et al. (2005, p.57) highlight the dangers of too many innovations in too short a time span; they maintain that ‘change knowledge is required to render overload into greater coherence’. Coherence making is an on-going and multifaceted process, as ‘creating coherence is a never-ending proposition that involves alignment, connecting the dots, being clear about how the big picture fits together’ (Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). Fullan (2002, p.19) contends that cultural-change principals realise that the main focus of educational change is student learning, and furthermore, they know that overload and fragmentation are inherent in such complex processes as change and reform. Fullan et al. (2005, p. 57) maintain that ‘change knowledge is about achieving new patterns of coherence that enable people to focus more deeply on how strategies for effective learning interconnect’.

Fullan et al. (2005) furthermore contend that all the key drivers interconnect in this process: the creation of the culture of learning and the culture of evaluation, capacity building, the creation of distributed leadership, all enable new patterns of coherence to develop. The person with the clearest vision of how the big picture fits together is usually the cultural-change principal. However, it could also be argued that the inspectors were the first people to see the big picture. To quote the former Chief Inspector, Stack (2009, p. 19), ‘inspection is about evidence gathering, being able to form judgements not just in one or two areas, but also on the totality of the education being provided in a school-to see the bigger picture.’ The inspectors’ Whole School Evaluation report in 2005 provided a blueprint for the principal to implement and enact new patterns of coherence.

The findings show that the parents and students were very aware of the changes brought about by the principal in the New Regime. Their words describe a principal who saw the big picture; seeing the big picture meant knowing there had to be changes in every facet connected to the learning environment, namely behaviour, classroom management, resources, providing study. The findings from the interviews substantiate this; as one parent put it:

'it seemed to all of us that there was zero tolerance of poor behaviour and the non-wearing of the uniform'.

The same parent opined:

'the principal had to change the culture, it took time, but it was perceived that she had succeeded'.

This is consistent with the literature; Moynihan and O'Donovan (2021, p. 15) found that principals 'are positively seeking to re-culture schools'. Although some teachers exhibited fear and reluctance regarding change, as described by Moynihan and O'Donovan (2021) and Brady (2016), the majority embraced re-culturing because students and teachers wanted to be in a school where teaching and learning was at the core of all activities, but they also wanted to be part of a calm, nice environment. A past pupil put it succinctly:

'the poor behaviour was not tolerated anymore, nor was the shouting or roaring ... that seemed to be a thing of the past. If you were going in for 40 minutes of learning, you were going to be taught'.

The inspectors described the situation in the school accurately in the 2005 WSE. I was the conduit, the implementer, who with members of staff put interventions in place to implement

and enact the recommendations. A couple of words from the findings, from a student, seem very apt:

'We initially thought, O God, this is going to be oppressive, and then actually the tide very quickly changed, I think within half a year, within kind of one semester, it was actually no, this is actually right, this is how things should be ... it was like a sea change'.

The transformation of the school took much longer than six months. It is fair to say that we were on the road to improvement in terms of implementing acceptable behaviour and clamping down on interruption of teaching and learning in a relatively short time, but it was an on-going process. However, as Fullan et al. (2005) further remind us, there were dips from time to time, and these occur inevitably in the process of implementing educational change. This is an accurate representation of the change process in this school. Fullan (2002, p. 19) argues that cultural change leaders look to the future and create a culture that has the capacity to find solutions for the long-term and not just the short-term. Fullan (2002) refers to long-term solutions as sustainable changes. The findings of the present study shows that sustainable changes were implemented in this school, following the blueprint provided in the recommendations furnished by the inspectorate, and the consequences of these sustainable changes are evident to this day. However, the school cannot rest on its laurels; there is always on-going improvement to be accomplished, and on-going improvement necessitates more on-going educational change, with the acceptance of the dips in implementation.

5.27 Conclusion

The research question set out to explore whether the recommendations of inspectors, after three Whole School Evaluations pertaining to a rural post-primary school in Ireland implemented

and enacted by me as principal, provided a blueprint for educational change. Through surveys and interviews with students, past-pupils, teachers, parents and ancillary staff, this question was probed, and findings revealed that yes indeed, the recommendations of three WSE reports pertaining to the school and implemented by me did provide a blueprint for school improvement and educational change. As a result of this main finding of this study, which is that the recommendations by the inspectors provided a blueprint for educational change, one could suggest that it could be generalised in its application to other schools in a similar difficult situation.

This study has demonstrated that the research question has been at the core of all of my research activity during the course of four years. From the beginning of my journey on the EdD programme, I knew that my research question would explore the impact of inspection on school improvement and educational change. The Education Act of 1998 changed the inspection model utterly. Section 13 of the 1998 Education Act transformed the role and responsibility of the Inspectorate, giving it wide-ranging powers including to support and advise recognised schools and teachers on matters pertaining to the provision of education. In relation to this present study, two sub-sections were particularly applicable; firstly, the onus on the Inspectorate to evaluate the organisation and operation of schools, as well as the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools, including the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of individual teachers; secondly, to evaluate the education standards in those schools.

Without doubt, these powers enabled the inspectors to evaluate the school in this present study effectively. These inspections particularly enabled questions of accountability to be posed that stressed compliance, such as how resources were allocated and how teachers accounted for

their time. Questions of responsibility regarding duty of care were also asked in relation to the suitability of streaming, for example. Other questions were posed, which resulted in change.

The findings in this research study strongly indicate that due to the implementation and enactment of the recommendations of these WSE evaluations by me, and with the support of the staff, this school was greatly assisted in initiating and continuing school improvement. The improvement and educational change process was incremental, as improvement and change do not take place overnight (Fullan, 2002; Fullan et al., 2005).

The WSE reports were undoubtedly catalysts for change and brought immense growth (Dillon, 2011; Brown, 2013; Griffin, 2010; Mathews, 2010). I would strongly argue that without these thorough and robust recommendations of the inspectors, which I as principal had the opportunity to implement and enact with the help of my staff, improvement in this school would not have taken place. There may have been slow changes at best or perhaps few changes at all. The WSE inspections brought pressure but also great support in the form of the recommendations to turn this school around.

I do not think that many scholars would label the WSE inspection reports of 2005, 2015, and 2018 to be 'light touch' or 'toothless'; on the contrary, the approach to WSE in my opinion is thorough, fair, firm and robust. The WSE experience was difficult for the members of the school community, particularly senior management and staff (Ball, 2003), and the WSE report (2005) was painful reading; however, it was a reality check for this school. The difficulties pertaining to the school were identified, and the negative aspects of policy and practice were exposed. Without this honest and professional appraisal of the inspectors and their solid recommendations, which were implemented and enacted by me with the support of the staff,

the blueprint for educational change would not have resulted. In a time of pain and sadness arising out of the inspection report, especially in 2005, progress would not have been possible without the ‘strong arm’ of the Inspectorate. Change was brought about because the recommendations were what was needed to bring about educational change to the school. The vast majority of staff and students bought into the process, which resulted in a positive outcome for the school.

Work psychology, according to Arnold et al. (2005), is about people’s behaviour, thoughts and emotions in the workplace. Work psychology can be used to improve our understanding and management of people (including ourselves as line managers) at work. I agree with the view that people are complicated, and that their views of themselves and their worlds differ. People do not necessarily do what others expect them to do, and this must be understood to move along the continuum to improvement.

One approach that would not have worked in this school was a highly controlling one. Buy-in was needed by the vast majority of staff to achieve our goal of school improvement, so as to offer a quality education to our students. Change would provide significant advantages for staff in terms of providing the optimum conditions for teaching and learning, in providing a better environment for their well-being and motivation. Change did not happen overnight, but it was facilitated by a general acceptance that we should all work together for the good of all but especially the students in the school. We had a purpose, and we harnessed the power of human connection and positive energy to move along the continuum towards school improvement.

Change regarding policy and practice places members of all schools under considerable pressure (Skerritt, 2020; Brady, 2019); however, using custom and practice as a justification to

resist change is unacceptable, in my opinion. I think that those who resist change for the aforementioned reason in any school following inspection recommendations could be likened to a ship's anchor weighing the school down. I have a similar opinion of those who resist all change, if the majority view is that change is necessary for the good of the students. It is worth noting that some resistance can serve as valuable feedback, which may help to clarify objectives and may actually aid in implementation of the change process. Resistance to change is a complex phenomenon, and it deserves time and attention from the principal as the main agent of change to encourage all staff members to engage in the change process.

Teaching and learning that is not reaching acceptable standards is called out rightly by the Inspectorate, as per their role and responsibility according to Section 13 Education Act 1998, since unacceptable standards negatively affect students' lives. Good teaching is always at the heart of maintaining standards. As a result of the recommendations of the WSE reports in 2005, 2015, and 2018, there was a move to distributed leadership (Harris and Spillane, 2008), moving the teachers in this school from being individualistic in their practice to becoming team players, encouraging collegiality and excellence, and extending leadership and responsibility to a wider group of people to bring about pedagogical change to the school. Distributed leadership in this school led to the creation of a highly effective teaching staff, which in turn led to increased positive outcomes for students.

Teachers in the school assumed distributed-leadership roles in keeping with the inspection report's recommendations. The teachers who assumed these roles as part of SSE were very knowledgeable and therefore highly effective in bringing about change to pedagogy. Collaboration and trust, as recommended by the inspectors, allowed us to establish a culture of learning in the school (Fullan, 2002; Fullan et al., 2005), which energised many professional

conversations among colleagues. It also brought about changes that resulted in the inclusion of students and parents in the decision-making of the school, and it facilitated increased student and parent voice (Smyth and McCoy, 2011).

In sum, we had faith in the professionalism, expertise and credibility of the inspection teams and therefore we took their recommendations on board, implemented and enacted them, which resulted in an improving school. Our attitude to change is that change is constant (Fullan, 2002; Fullan et al., 2005), and we had the confidence and competence to implement innovation following inspection. We still do. I often remind myself of Coolahan's (1994, p.42) insightful summary of the core duties of school principal as

‘creating a supportive school climate, with particular emphasis on the curriculum and teaching and directed towards maximising academic learning, having clear goals and high expectations for staff and students, establishing good systems for monitoring student performance, promoting on-going staff development and in-service, and encouraging strong parental involvement and identification with and support for the goals of the school.’

If we add student voice to the above, we, as principals, would have the recipe for success in making sure that our schools are quality and effective institutions that would undoubtedly serve the needs of all our students and staff. We would meet the criteria of excellence in leadership and management in Whole School Evaluation, as identified by the Inspectorate in their framework document, *LAOS* (2022), and we would be doing our job.

5.28 Recommendations

In light of the very thorough inspections which were carried out by the inspectors in 2005, 2015 and 2018, I would like to add the following recommendations:

If a school is determined by the inspectors to be an underperforming school, in an initial inspection which is not a WSE-MLL, I would suggest the following: that following a WSE-MLL inspection and if the school is confirmed as being underperforming, one of the inspectors would then act as a liaison person between the school and the Inspectorate. I would suggest that the principal would be the contact person in the school. I would recommend on-going communication between the inspector and the principal to discuss the implementation and enactment of the recommendations. This kind of support would be extremely useful to all parties in initiating educational change. It would be very beneficial for the principal to have a critical friend to discuss the ongoing journey of improvement. The inspector in my view would be the most effective person to carry out this role in these circumstances.

A second recommendation would be that, in the case of an underperforming school, the Inspectorate might enlist a former principal (on a temporary basis) who had succeeded in implementing educational change to work as a co-professional on this type of inspection only.

5.29 Limitations of This Study

Although the quantitative participants of this study were taken from the entire population of students, parents and teachers in the school, the qualitative participants were selected by this researcher; therefore this study does not set out to generalise the findings, as it was a limited case study subject to one school. However, the main finding of this study, which is that the

recommendations by the inspectors provided a blueprint for educational change, can be generalised in its application to other underperforming schools.

A second limitation is that this researcher may also have influenced either the content or phrasing of content during the interviews. I would acknowledge that in future, given better time constraints or funding available, a double-blind interview might yield more robust data.

A third limitation is that the data was collected at a fixed point in time, and therefore the data is limited to that point in time. Given more time and resources, I would have surveyed the past pupils in the school, namely those students who were in the school pre-2005 and post-2005.

A fourth limitation is that some may consider me to be an insider researcher. I would argue that I did not have any part in the formulation of the recommendations, and that I was solely the implementer. The fact that I was not in the school during the WSE (2005) gave me an objectivity in relation to implementing the findings; however, I think that it was an advantage that I could analyse at close quarters the impact of the WSE recommendations on providing a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in the school.

5.30 Suggestions for Further Research

I would suggest that further research could be carried out into the impact of WSE recommendations on educational change in the various types of post-primary schools in Ireland. This type of research could in turn contribute to the body of research on student voice as an integral element of both WSE and SSE.

Appendix A: Teacher Interview Questions

Principal

Thanks a million for coming in to see me today. I'd like to first of all, ask you, when did you start teaching here?

Principal

Okay, and what subjects do you teach here?

Principal

I want to bring your memory back to a time before the Whole School Evaluation in 2005. Obviously, the WSE pinpointed certain difficulties in the school. So could you just remember back maybe about some of the difficulties that you remember here please at that time?

Principal

Because of the behaviour that you've described in the classroom, were the students actually coming into school, was there a problem with attendance?

Principal

What were the issues in the classroom regarding behaviour at that time?

Principal

And that must have been very difficult for a teacher to actually come into school every day having everything prepared, having an expectation that you are going to teach, when there was just a kind of chaotic barrier to actually teaching?

Principal

What were the issues regarding homework at that time?

Principal

How would you describe the relationship of students with the teachers?

Principal

Was it difficult to teach?

Principal

What was morale like amongst the staff?

Principal

What's your memory of the state of the plant? The toilets, classrooms, corridors, grounds?

Principal

What was it like out in the community? What was the perception of the school at the time?

Principal

What was it like for teachers getting resources here at that time?

Principal

So was it possible really for a teacher to have high academic expectations for students?

Principal

Did students have a strong work ethic at that time?

Principal

What was communication with parents like at that time?

Principal

So then I'm bringing you to the 2005 WSE inspection. What are your memories of that inspection? They went into quite a number of classes. They spoke to a lot of the stakeholders in the school, did you ever see or read the report?

Principal

What did you think of the report? Was it a valid description of what was going on?

Principal

What was the reaction of the staff when the WSE report findings were communicated to staff?

Principal

So what happened then, when the new principal came in, what was her way of doing things?

Principal

The outer layer first, and then, what was next?

Principal

Were there changes regarding behaviour?

Principal

What are your views about the changes regarding students and taking different levels?

Principal

The toilets were refurbished, a year later? What is the story now?

Principal

What is the classroom management like now?

Principal

The last two academic years were difficult with the pandemic. How have things been?

Principal

Do students have high expectations now?

Principal

Your views on the extra study now provided at evenings and weekends?

Principal

Do the students feel safe here?

Principal

What's the impact of teachers getting the resources that they need to teach?

Appendix B: Current Student Interview Questions

Principal

Thank you for coming in to speak with me. So can you tell me first of all when you started in this school?

Principal

Okay, can you tell me about the standard of teaching in this school, in your experience.

Principal

Do teachers use a variety of methodologies?

Principal

Now, talking about teaching, I suppose feedback is very important. If you do an assignment for one of your teachers, can you describe the kind of feedback you get in general from teachers?

Principal

What do you as a learner like to see going on in the classroom?

Principal

We are a Catholic school. What I mean by that is, that our actions, things that we do, and things that we say, are guided by our moral compass, And in our case it's a Catholic faith. So would you say, as a student, that you're aware of the ethos of this school, what is the ethos of the school, in your opinion?

Principal

And what do you think about student welfare in the school?

Principal

Okay, now, school climate, that is when you walk into a school, any school, as a stranger. You walk in the front door, you can immediately realise by what you see, and by what you

hear, how they do business here. From your perspective, what is the school climate like in this school?

Principal

What do you think of how the in-school, senior management, principal and deputy, perform their duties?

Principal

Does this school have high expectations for all of the students?

Principal

What do you think of providing study at weekends and in the evening time free of charge for all students who wish to attend?.

Principal

Have you enjoyed attending this school? I know you've one more year to go but so far have you enjoyed it?

Principal

Thanks so much for taking part in this interview.

Appendix C: Past-Pupil Interview Questions

Principal

Thanks very much for coming in to see me today. It is really great for me to have this opportunity to talk to you.

Principal

So I suppose my first question, when did you go to this school?

Principal

Okay, yeah. And so therefore, you left in X year.

Principal

Now this is a Catholic school, so by our words and by our actions, we should live our Catholic faith. What did you think about the ethos in the school at the time?

Principal

What are your first memories of this school, maybe, start with the entrance test, how would you describe it ?

Mary O' Doherty

I understand, then, when you came to on your first day, I presume you were all put into a line in the dining area. This was the eventful day when you were told basically what class you were going to be assigned based on the results of the entrance exam, do you remember that?

Principal

Were you very aware at the time that you were not in the A class?

Principal

So maybe we could first of all talk about the standard of teaching in this school up to 2005.

What would be your views on that?

Principal

Would you say that the teachers had high expectations of their students?

Principal

Yeah. And what about the class that you were in, your base class, and when you went to options? What was the behaviour in general? Can you remember the behaviour of the students?

Principal

So was there much teaching and learning done in the classes? Can you remember?

Principal

So some people have spoken to me about the plant, which is the building...do you have any memories of that?

Principal

Did you enjoy your time here?

Principal

Climate, school climate is very important for everybody really, in the school, particularly for students. And I suppose if they're comfortable, they feel welcome. What was the climate like in this school at that time?

Principal

What was the student teacher relationship like at the time?

Principal

What did you think about the Senior Management team, the principal and the deputy principal?

Principal

What was the overall management strategy in dealing with discipline like here in this school?

Principal

What are your views about streaming?

Principal

Would you have a sense that the school didn't serve you well?

Principal

Thanks, that was a very insightful view of your time in this school.

Appendix D: Former Inspector Interview Questions

Principal

I wish to thank you profusely for affording me the opportunity to do this interview today.

Principal

I would like to ask you about the first theme of evaluation today by the Inspectorate, which is the quality of school leadership and management, what are you looking at here?

Principal

So what does quality of leadership and management mean to you?

Principal

You saw so many styles of school leadership, no doubt.

Principal

What about homework....? Some teachers have different views on homework.

Principal

The role of the principal today-what are your views?

Principal

Inspection Reports.....what are the advantages of them?

Principal

What do you think of the WSE process?

Principal

What are your thoughts on schools which are struggling?

Principal

Role of the staff and/or the principal....

Principal

Can I just ask you one further question? I suppose we as principals have always got this idea that inspectors come in with a document, a template to use as a benchmark during the inspection?

Principal

Well, it has been a pleasure, thank you so much for your time and for your knowledge and of course your reflections were so interesting.

Appendix E: Deputy Principal Interview Questions

Principal

Thanks a million for coming in to see me this afternoon. As you know, I'm doing a study on the impact of inspection reports on this school. So there are a few questions I'd like to ask you, based on the inspection reports. So I suppose the first thing that I'd like to ask you about is what are the characteristics of a quality school according to the Inspectorate and in your opinion has this school got any of those characteristics?

Principal

You mentioned the importance of resources

Principal

Continuous Professional Development

Principal

You mentioned the importance of the quality of curriculum provision in a school.

Principal

Obviously, the school has had to change over the years, you know, it started at a very low ebb in 2005, is there anything you would have done differently, obviously, you weren't here in 2005, but is there any area which was neglected?

Principal

You mentioned the journey as regards improving the quality of teaching and learning, can you elaborate please?

Principal

You mentioned the role of technology in teaching and learning during Covid, could you unpack that for me please?

Principal

Student voice? Where are we on the journey? What would the students say?

Principal

Homework, can you unpack your view on homework?

Principal

Your views on feedback?

Principal

Are you optimistic about the future of this school?

Principal

Great, thanks a million.

Appendix F: Ancillary Staff Interview Questions

Principal: Thanks very much for doing this interview with me today, I really appreciate it.

You have been here for many years. Could I ask you to think back to 1995 and tell me about the school.

Principal: What type of other things were happening at that time?

Principal: What was the atmosphere in the school like then?

Principal: What was the condition of the building itself at that time?

Principal: How did senior management deal with the situation in your opinion?

Principal: Was there a visible presence on the corridors?

Principal: How did teachers deal with the situation in your opinion?

Principal: What was the state of the student toilets?

Principal: Was there vandalism in the school building and in the school grounds?

Appendix G: Parent Interview Questions

Principal

Great, thanks a million for agreeing to this interview. As you know, I'm doing a research project on this school. And I'm particularly interested in speaking with you, primarily as a parent, but I also want you to talk about the experience that your children had in the school, but as a parent when you chose this school for your children did it have a good reputation in the local community?

Principal

Now, what did you think of the standard of teaching in this school for the whole span of your children's education, as one of your children is still in the school?.

Principal

Great, and what would you think of the relationship as a parent between yourself, and the principal and deputy in this school?

Principal

And what about looking at this school as a Catholic school, you know, what do you think of the ethos here?

Principal

What do you think of the academic achievement in the years your children attended the school?

Principal

What changes did you notice when the new principal started?

Principal

You mentioned the board of management, do you have prior knowledge of the work of the board?

Principal

Tell me your views on the role of the parents in this school.

Principal

What did you think of the supervised study?

Principal

Thanks for giving me this interview, it is much appreciated.

Appendix H: Exit Survey

Note: An Exit Survey was completed by 6th year students in their final week of school.

Introduction:

Thank you so much for completing this survey. I appreciate it greatly. I do not share your individual feedback, however, I do use your feedback as an instrument for school improvement in our school. Improvements have been made over the past years as a result of student surveys. This survey should take you 10 minutes to complete.

School climate, respect and discipline

During my time in this school, students were treated with respect.

- Strongly agree
- agree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

During my time in this school, I felt respected by teachers and school management

1 2 3 4 5

Highly respected	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not respected
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During my time in this school, I felt respected by my peers.

1 2 3 4 5

Highly respected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not respected
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In general, during my time in this school, I felt safe.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

In general, the management of student conduct and discipline, by the following people, was fair.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deputy Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Year- Head Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

During Senior Cycle, my classes in this school were intellectually challenging.

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly disagree

During Senior Cycle, my classes in this school were engaging.

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly disagree

My teachers showed enthusiasm for teaching in my classes in senior cycle.

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly Disagree

In general, during senior cycle, homework was assigned by all teachers every day.

- () Most of the time
- () Usually
- () About half the time
- () Seldom
- () Never

During senior cycle, my teachers set regular class tests.

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly Disagree

During senior cycle, I received regular feedback on my homework and class tests.

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly disagree

During senior cycle, I found the feedback on my homework and class tests to be useful in advancing my learning.

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly disagree

Student Voice

In general, I felt that I had a voice in decisions made about me in school.

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly disagree

In general, in this school, students were encouraged to voice their opinion

- () Strongly agree
- () Agree
- () Disagree
- () Strongly Disagree

Well-Being and Exam Anxiety

Did you feel anxious about examinations and class tests in senior cycle?

- () Always
- () Very Often
- () Sometimes
- () Rarely
- () Never

Who made you anxious? (If you selected Always, Very Often or Sometimes)

- () Teachers/ school
- () Parent/ parents
- () Self
- () Peers

If you selected Always, Very Often or Sometimes who offered you support?

- () Teachers/school
- () Parent/ parents
- () Self
- () Peers
- () No one

Thank you for completing this survey.

Appendix I: Ethics Approval Form

Ms. Mary O'Doherty
School of Policy and Practice

Prof. Gerry McNamara
School of Policy and Practice

21st January 2021

REC Reference: DCUREC/2020/247

Proposal Title: The Impact of Department of Education and Skills Whole School Inspection Reports on driving school improvement in a rural secondary school in the Republic of Ireland.

Applicant(s): Ms. Mary O'Doherty, Prof. Gerry McNamara, Dr. John White, and Dr. Martin Brown

Dear Colleagues,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Geraldine Scanlon', is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Dr Geraldine Scanlon
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee



Appendix J: Plain Language Statement

The Study

The research question which this research sought to answer: “Did the recommendations and implementation of the recommendations pertaining to three Whole School Evaluations provide a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in a post-primary secondary school in rural Ireland?”. This study is being undertaken by Mary O’ Doherty to fulfil the Doctor of Education programme (Ed. D) requirements in Dublin City University (D.C.U.) Institute of Education. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Professor Gerry McNamara and Dr. Martin Brown of the DCU Institute of Education. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to hear directly from present students, past-pupils, teachers, ancillary staff, parents and former inspectors whether the recommendations arising from three whole school inspection reports provided a blueprint for improvement and educational change in a post-primary school in rural Ireland. The research has been granted approval by the Ethics and Research Committee in Dublin City University (D.C.U.)

What is required from the participants?

This is the first of a two-phase, mixed-methods study. Should you choose to participate in this phase, you will be asked to answer a series of open and closed questions in the following survey. This should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

All responses are anonymous; if you are willing to engage in a follow-up interview you will be required to provide your contact details to the researcher who may contact you at a later date. This will be in the second phase of the study. If you choose to participate in the follow-up interview, it is envisaged that it will take 30 minutes approximately.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of respondents is protected within the limitations of the law. Your responses will be treated confidentially, if you choose to participate in this survey. No individual will be identifiable in reporting findings. If you choose to participate in the follow-up interviews, all identifying details (name) will be removed prior to publication. While personal data remains confidential, there is some risk that the programme itself (the Doctor of Education) and the institution (Dublin City University) may be identifiable to a reader. This is because the researcher will be submitting the thesis for consideration for the said award at the said institution.

How will the Data be used?

Your data and the data from all other participants will be used to publish the findings in a thesis to be submitted for the award of Doctor of Education. On successful completion of the award, the thesis will be published online via DCU Open Access Repository (DORAS). The findings of the study may also be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. In all instances, no identifying personal information will be used in these publications/presentations.

Handling of Personal Data – GDPR Compliance

The data controller for the study is the researcher, Mary O’ Doherty. If you have any queries regarding your personal data, or any other aspect of this study, I can be contacted at: mary.odoherty22@mail.dcu.ie

If you have any concerns regarding your personal data, you can contact the DCU Data Protection Officer, Mr. Martin Ward, email: data.protection@dcu.ie

The data controller will retain any data collected and stored electronically on an encrypted laptop, in a password-protected computer file. Data may be shared with the supervisors for the

purposes of validating the findings; however, all identifiers will be removed before sharing the data. The data will be retained for a maximum of five years.

The Data Protection Acts, of 1988 and 2003, the Data Protection Bill of 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) provide a right to access by an individual to data subject to personal information held. If a participant wishes to access their data, they should contact the Dublin City University (DCU) Data Protection Unit.

A data subject may lodge a complaint with the Data Protection Commission email: info@dataprotection.ie

Giving Informed Consent

This is a voluntary study, you may therefore choose to withdraw from this research study at any time. However, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it may not be possible to withdraw your data once the survey has been completed and submitted. If you wish to participate in this study, you must give informed consent by completing the informed consent section prior to completing the survey. Should you choose to participate in the follow-up interview, you will be required to give informed consent again prior to commencing the interview.

Researcher Disclosure

The researcher, Mary O'Doherty, is a student on the Doctor of Education programme at DCU. I am undertaking this research as a student to satisfy the requirements of the award sought. If any participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary,

DCU Research Ethics Committee,

C/O Research and Innovation Support,

Dublin City University,

Dublin 9

Or rec@dcu.ie

Appendix K: Informed Consent Form for Survey

Research Study Title

Did the recommendations of three whole school evaluation reports in 2005, 2015 and 2018 implemented by the principal provide a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in a post-primary school in rural Ireland?

This study is being undertaken by Mary O’Doherty to fulfil the Doctor of Education programme requirements in Dublin City University (D.C.U.) Institute of Education.

The Purpose of the Research

This research is being conducted under the supervision of Professor Gerry McNamara and Dr. Martin Brown. The purpose of this mixed method study is to explore whether or not the recommendations of whole school evaluations which were implemented by the principal provided a blueprint for school improvement in a post-primary school in rural Ireland. This research has been approved by the Ethics and Research Committee in D.C.U. of the requirements highlighted in the Plain Language Statement.

Participation in a survey

Please complete the following consent form by ticking Yes or No for each question.

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	Yes/ No
I understand the information provided	Yes/ No
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	Yes/ No
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	Yes/ No
I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions	Yes/ No

I confirm that my involvement in this research study is voluntary Yes/ No

I understand that I may withdraw from this research study at any point Yes/ No

I understand the arrangements that have been put in place to protect the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations Yes/No

I have received information regarding the retention/disposal of data Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and I have a copy of the consent form. Therefore, I content to take part in this research project.

Participant Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Date:

Appendix L : Informed Consent Form for Interviews

Research Study Title

Did the recommendations of three whole school evaluation reports in 2005, 2015 and 2018 implemented by the principal provide a blueprint for school improvement and educational change in a post-primary school in rural Ireland?

This study is being undertaken by Mary O’Doherty to fulfil the Doctor of Education programme requirements in Dublin City University (D.C.U.) Institute of Education.

The Purpose of the Research

This research is being conducted under the supervision of Professor Gerry McNamara and Dr. Martin Brown. The purpose of this mixed method study is to explore whether or not the recommendations of whole school evaluations which were implemented by the principal provided a blueprint for school improvement in a post-primary school in rural Ireland. This research has been approved by the Ethics and Research Committee in D.C.U. of the requirements highlighted in the Plain Language Statement.

Participation in a semi-structured interview with audio taping.

Please complete the following consent form by ticking Yes or No for each question.

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	Yes/ No
I understand the information provided	Yes/ No
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	Yes/ No
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	Yes/ No
I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions	Yes/ No
I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped	Yes/ No
I confirm that my involvement in this research study is voluntary	Yes/ No
I understand that I may withdraw from this research study at any point	Yes/ No
I understand the arrangements that have been put in place to protect the	

confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Yes/No

I have received information regarding the retention/disposal of data

Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and I have a copy of the consent form. Therefore, I content to take part in this research project.

Participant Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Date:

Appendix M: Parent Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Please circle your response.

Please answer every question and do not leave any question blank.

1. There is a good atmosphere in the school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

2. I feel welcome in the school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

3. The school is well-run

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

4. Discipline is good in the school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

5. My child feels safe and well looked after in the school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

6. My child is treated fairly and respectfully in the school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

7. The school helps my child's social and personal development

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

8. I have been informed of the school's Code of Behaviour/School Rules

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

9. I have been informed of the school's anti-bullying policy

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

10. I know who to approach in the school if my child experiences bullying

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

11. I am confident that if my child experiences bullying, the school will act promptly and effectively

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

12. My child enjoys school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

13. Teaching is good in the school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

14. My child has been taught in school about drugs and alcohol issues

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

15. I have been informed of the details of the relationships and sexuality policy of the school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

16. My child is doing well in school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

17. I am happy with the amount of homework my child gets

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

18. School reports give me a good picture of how my child is doing

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

19. I received helpful advice from the school when my child was choosing subjects

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

20. The school consults me if my child needs extra help

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

21. I know who to talk to in the school if there is a problem

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

22. I am satisfied with the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

23. The school regularly seeks the views of parents on school matters

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

24. Financial contributions to help the running of the school are voluntary

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

25. The board of management reports annually to parents on the work of the school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

26. The school's parents' association keeps me informed about its work

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

27. Overall I am happy with the school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix N: Teacher Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Please circle your answers

Please answer every question and do not leave any question blank.

Ethics and Core Values

1. The core values of this school are implemented in the day to day life of the school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

2. All students are treated fairly and respectfully in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

3. The behaviour of students is generally good in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

4. This school deals with all types of bullying promptly and effectively

All of the time. Most of the time Some of the time Almost never. Never

5. Facilities supporting students' learning are good in this school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

6. In this school, students are encouraged by staff to maximise their potential

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

7. Students with special educational needs are included in classroom and school life

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

Teaching

8. I like working in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

9. There is a good atmosphere in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

10. There are good student support systems in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

11. There is good communication among staff in this school

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

12. The curriculum offered by this school is sufficiently broad to meet the needs of our students

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

13. Teachers collaborate well and share good practice with each other in this school

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

14. The subject department structure in this school supports teaching and learning effectively

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

15. I give regular homework to my students

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

16. I collect copies regularly

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

17. I give regular written feedback to my students

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

18. Subject plans inform teaching and learning in this school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

19. School self-evaluation is used to improve students' learning in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

20. Teachers in this school are encouraged to avail of continuous professional development opportunities

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

21. I have good access to ICT facilities

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

22. Senior management provide me with the resources I require

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

23. The view of teachers is part of the decision-making process in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

24. Whole-school organisational policies (code of behaviour, anti-bullying process etc.) inform day-to-day life in this school

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

25. New teachers are well supported when they start to work in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

26. The in-school management system in this school is effective

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

27. The board of management is very supportive of all staff in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

28. This school is well-run

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

29. I have a good understanding of the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

30. The code of behaviour is implemented consistently by teaching staff in this school

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

Parents

31. This school is welcoming of parents

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

32. Parents in this school are given good quality information on their child's progress

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

33. This school seeks the view of parents/guardians on relevant school matters

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

Once again thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Appendix O: Student Survey.

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Please answer every question and do not leave any question blank.

Please circle your answer.

Ethos

1. I enjoy school

All of the time. Most of the time Some of the time Almost never. Never

2. I feel cared for in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

3. I am proud to be a student in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

4. I have a say in how things are done in this school.

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

5. There is an adult in school I can talk to if something is worrying me

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

6. My school encourages me to respect people from other backgrounds

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

7. In this school there are clear rules against hurting other people by what we say or do.

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

8. If someone is bullying me, I can get help from a teacher or other adult in the school

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

9. I feel safe when I am at school

All of the time. Most of the time Some of the time Almost never. Never

10. My school is well-run

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

11. The behaviour of other students around the school is good

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

12. I am encouraged by the principal and deputy principal to reach my full potential

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

13. My school encourages me to be independent

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

14. The principal and deputy principal look after the students in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

Quality of curriculum provision

15. There is a wide choice of subjects in this school

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

Quality of Teaching and Learning

16. Teachers help me to do my best

In every class. In most classes. In some classes. In very few classes. Never.

17. I enjoy learning in this school

All of the time. Most of the time Some of the time Almost never. Never

18. Teachers listen to me and pay attention to what I say

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

19. The behaviour of other students in my class is good

All of the time. Most of the time Some of the time Almost never. Never

20. Attendance in class is checked regularly

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

21. My classes begin on time

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

22. My teachers make my classes interesting

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

23. I have very few free classes each week

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

24. I am getting on well with my school work

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

25. The teachers in this school encourage me to perform to the best of my ability

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

26. Teachers talk to me about how I can improve my learning

Strongly disagree. Disagree. Neutral. Agree. Strongly agree.

27. I get opportunities to work with other students in my class

A great deal. A lot. Moderately. A little. Not at all.

28. My homework is corrected regularly

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

29. We as students use technology in class

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Never

30. I get on well with my teachers

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

31. Teaching is good in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

Supervised Study

32. I like having the opportunity to go to study directly after school if I wish

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

33. I like having the opportunity to go to evening study if I wish (Mon-Thurs)

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

34. I like having the opportunity to go to study on Saturdays and Sundays if I wish

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

35. I like having the opportunity to go to study during holidays to revise or to complete my projects

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

Other

36. I have fun in this school

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

37. I would recommend this school to any new student

Strongly agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly disagree

Once again thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

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