



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Ard Scoil na nDéise
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Convent Row Dungarvan Co. Waterford
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	64900W
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	27/02/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	06/06/2025

What is a whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning?

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools (revised 2023).6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> or <i>Bí Cineálta (2024)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils.3. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment in line with their current policy.4. All teachers visited report that they have read the school's current policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying.

<p>and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).</p> <p>7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE).</p> <p>8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.</p>	
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Dates of inspection	24/02/2025 – 27/02/2025
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with acting principal and acting deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Ard Scoil na nDéise is an all-girls voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education an Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). At the time of the evaluation the school had an enrolment of 271 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle programme and the Leaving Certificate (Established), the school offered an optional Transition Year programme (TY). At the time of the evaluation there was an acting principal and acting deputy principal in place.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Respect, care and friendship, and the desire to support students to reach their full potential, were fostered within lessons and at whole-school level.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good, manifested in very high quality lesson planning and delivery, close monitoring of student participation and the provision of differentiated support.
- A broad curriculum was provided; collaborations with a local school and a number of community organisations indicated strategic curriculum planning.
- The senior leadership team worked diligently to ensure the smooth day-to-day operation of the school. The team was fully invested in the students, valued the contributions of parents and the community, and were extremely proud of all staff.
- Management fostered the development of teachers' leadership capacities and encouraged teachers professional learning.
- The school had engaged with school self-evaluation (SSE). Related work was captured in improvement plans, but there was a need to further reflect on the implementation and impact of associated strategies.
- All students were supported to achieve academically, including those challenged by personal, social and learning obstacles.
- Students' wellbeing was very well promoted and supported through a significant focus on enhancing wellbeing protective factors and minimising wellbeing risk factors.

Recommendations

- To further develop the noted good quality of leadership and management, and to support consistency in development planning and the sustained achievement of related goals, the board should assume oversight of the realisation of key priorities. Key aspects for development should be collaboratively agreed, an action plan prepared, and working groups established.
- In line with the Education Act, 1998, the board should arrange for the compilation of a school plan and ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated.

- In addition to planned SSE around wellbeing promotion, teachers should maintain and strengthen existing strategies relating to student reflection and feedback. This could be achieved through focusing on teaching and learning for Wellbeing and formative assessment.
- To enhance existing good quality planning, units of learning and programmes of work could be further developed by subject departments. Particular attention should be paid to the identification of key learning, assessment tasks and associated success criteria.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good.

Learner outcomes and experiences

There was a clear sense of enjoyment in almost all lessons. Students' enjoyment was obvious in their application to tasks, especially collaborative tasks which were observed in the majority of lessons. Teachers' enjoyment was demonstrated in their positive demeanours, personable interactions, and their passion for their subjects and the craft of teaching. Students worked calmly but productively.

Students were motivated to engage, as demonstrated in their high levels of attentiveness, co-operation and participation in all lessons. At times, students displayed an eagerness that generated an infectious energy. Students were positive about their learning and their capacity to learn, attributing this sentiment to their positive classroom learning experiences. Students could explain the learning process and outcomes. In most lessons, students demonstrated satisfaction with their progress, with some displaying delight in their learning and achievement.

In all lessons, students were facilitated to provide inputs that found their basis in prior learning or life experiences. There were students in all lessons who demonstrated a willingness to risk giving an incorrect response. The basis for this inclination was grounded in teachers' work to support students to identify a more accurate response.

Best practice was observed where collaborative tasks were supported by clear teacher directions, the sharing of success criteria, the provision of worked examples, and the identification of discussion points or questions. It was suggested at times that teachers consider a strategic grouping of students so that all groups experienced similar levels of achievement and feelings of success.

Students listened to one another when working together and they persisted when challenges arose. The latter was fostered by all teachers who remained attentive to needs and offered additional guidance. At times, when feedback was being gathered, students were less attentive. This tendency merited greater management.

Respect, care and friendship, values that were enshrined in the school's mission statement, were promoted and supported in all lessons. This was evident in what teachers said and how they said it. It was demonstrated in how teachers worked with students and in their keen awareness of abilities and needs. It was equally obvious in the manner in which teachers read situations and worked to make things better or easier for learners. Students also brought the values of respect and care to their own interactions with their teachers or peers. All of this supported the creation of inclusive learning environments.

Students displayed subject-specific skills and knowledge in their lesson contributions, application to tasks, and records of learning. In line with the national focus on key skills, students were given the opportunity to be literate, numerate and creative, to communicate and work with others, to manage themselves, information and thinking, and to develop the knowledge and skills to support their wellbeing. There was evidence over several years that students' level of attainment in leaving certificate examinations enabled them to progress in their chosen pathways.

All of this promoted student wellbeing and supported the students to reach their potential both as learners and as young people.

Teachers individual and collective practice

Planning for lessons was of a high or very high quality. Lessons were well-structured, appropriately paced, and demonstrated smooth transitions. Teachers designed or selected a range of valuable resources which encouraged and supported students' participation, understanding and learning.

As relevant, recapitulation activities were accommodated to check understanding and link existing and new learning. The lesson plan was always shared with students. Best practice, as observed in more than half of the lessons, was where teachers shared the lesson plan by using a series of considered learning intentions. These were most effective when they were focused on student activity and learning and grounded in action verbs. This approach, which outlined expectations for the learners and fostered a sense of responsibility for their own learning, is encouraged in all lessons. Teachers provided for very carefully considered activities, ones that aligned with the plan and supported the achievement of learning intentions.

The quality of teacher instruction was very high, guiding and supporting students to engage with and complete tasks. As appropriate, this included provision for task modelling by the teacher and stimulus materials, both of which sought to prepare students for an activity. All teachers monitored levels of student engagement and participation. As required, teachers offered additional support and seized opportunities to correct emerging misconceptions. At times, it was advised that teachers ensure all students are listening when additional guidance is offered. On occasion, there was scope to further process activities in order to maximise learning.

In all lessons, students' capacities to manage information and thinking was fostered. To this end, teachers encouraged students to develop their own ideas, provided students with a word bank to scaffold engagement, designed worksheets to enhance learning from video or audio clips, and prepared workbooks to support note making and practice exercises. Such approaches are highly commended and further encouraged.

In a small number of lessons, global questioning was overemphasised. At times, there was scope to incorporate approaches that encouraged increased student participation through a more targeted, hands-down approach, and provide opportunities for students to create questions.

In modern foreign language lessons, the use of the target language positively predominated, while an appropriate balance of speaking, listening, writing and reading activities was accommodated.

Students' copybooks contained well-organised notes and activities. Homework was checked by the teacher, and there was some evidence of initialling and dating work. It was also clear that students regularly corrected their work in class. A small number of copybooks provided examples of teacher comment, but very few showed evidence of formative teacher feedback or student reflections. There was some evidence of the use of success criteria, but not in relation to homework exercises. In light of the school's relatively recent SSE focus on both feedback and student reflection, these findings merit further exploration.

Time was provided in more than half of lessons for a lesson conclusion. Best practice was when this included student voice, supported student reflection, captured levels of understanding, and provided space for students to communicate outstanding queries or concerns. This is further encouraged.

There was very little evidence of the use of digital technologies to support teaching and learning during lessons. It was suggested that the digital learning plan be expanded to include a greater emphasis on the integration of digital technology in lessons.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

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

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of the outcomes associated with leading teaching and learning were very good. All students were systematically supported through junior and senior cycles, including those challenged by personal, social and learning obstacles. An associated provision of individualised

support and care, alongside the adaptation of resources and approaches, promoted an equality of opportunity.

Significant efforts were made to offer a broad curriculum, collaborating with a local school to maintain leaving certificate option subjects. There was an openness to expanding the curriculum as resources permit, especially in the technologies. Linking with local organisations to support the delivery of Physical Education and extra-curricular sporting activities was another positive.

TY included desirable provision for core subjects, subject sampling, TY modules, and once-off events. Students were most positive about TY and its contribution to their academic, personal and social development, and their exploration of future pathways. This was reflected in the fact that almost all students chose to complete TY. The use of a digital portfolio supported students to log learning, reflect on their progress, and to quote the students themselves, "to capture great memories".

Students and parents were very well supported around subject choice. Subject sampling and information evenings promoted informed decision-making, and student preferences informed the construction of subject bands.

The assignment of students to base classes was informed by a vision of mixed ability, but this was not being fully realised. The formation of future base classes should be further informed by this vision and the associated principle of inclusion.

The special educational needs (SEN) department was located in the heart of the school. A commendable feature was the fluid nature of the support provided, which offered scope for students to 'graduate' or move on as appropriate. The work was overseen by qualified, experienced and highly committed co-ordinators, both in SEN and English as an additional language (EAL). Students benefited from meticulous planning, early identification of needs, effective communication, consultation with parents, and high levels of staff collaboration. Planning and provision for students with EAL placed a commendable dual emphasis on conversational fluency and the development of language needed to access the curriculum. Over half of the staff were involved in the delivery of learning support and teachers involved changed from year to year. It was recommended that a smaller team of core teachers be developed. The expansion of team teaching was also suggested.

Teachers were suitably qualified and demonstrated confidence in their respective subject classrooms. Management supported teachers' professional learning and all teachers had engaged with relevant opportunities. A number of teachers were supported to complete additional qualifications inspired by either an innate desire to expand their knowledge and skills or to support school management to manage ongoing provision in specialist areas.

Managing the organisation

The overall quality of the management of the organisation was good, with significant strengths observed in the acting senior leadership team's diligent efforts to ensure the smooth day-to-day operation of the school.

Where the values of respect, care and friendship are promoted and supported, as they were in Ard Scoil na nDéise, feelings of belonging, appreciation and trust emerge. The students, staff, parents and board members met during the evaluation all communicated a strong sense of being accepted, valued and trusted. A safe, secure, supportive and spirited learning environment existed. This was manifested in: an extremely well maintained building; personable interactions; quiet spaces, including an impressive school library; and walls that were alive with student work, including exceptional artwork and evidence of learning and achievement.

The board of management was properly constituted and met regularly, with a valuable blending of individuals who were experienced and new to the role. The board reported to the patron and prepared an agreed report for nominating bodies. The acting principal's comprehensive report to the board was highly effective in providing insight into all aspects of life in the school.

To enhance the board's role in the policy development and review process, an up-to-date policy register should be developed. It was recommended that the finalisation and ratification of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy be prioritised. It was suggested that the

board invite key staff to provide periodic progress updates on, for example, key priorities and inspection findings and recommendations.

The acting senior leadership team demonstrated a proactive working relationship informed by an inclusive vision. Both members were fully invested in the students, valued the role of parents and members of the community, and were extremely proud of all staff. They communicated a sense of hope and enthusiasm for the future. It is no surprise that in seven months this team had set the school on a journey of renewal and growth. In addition to daily team meetings, the team's calendar included provision for a series of scheduled, weekly meetings with key personnel. The composition of these team meetings merited further consideration, with a view to maximising available time and optimising communication and impact.

Key management and leadership roles had been devolved to ten assistant principals and related outcomes indicated an underlying spirit of collaboration, co-operation and community. This spirit was also borne out in the willingness of a number of teachers to assume leadership roles not linked to the post structure. Assistant principals contributed effectively to the day-to-day management of the school, especially but not exclusively, in the areas of student support and wellbeing. As part of the review process, it is recommended that the schedule of posts be revisited to: refine specific roles; consider duplication of responsibilities, especially in the areas of SSE, teaching and learning, and digital learning technologies; and contemplate the re-establishment of academic monitoring and tracking. Finally, given the school's growth potential, the roles and responsibilities for each post should be kept under review to ensure duties assigned are aligned with emerging priorities.

Communication systems and processes were highly effective, and the school communicated very successfully with home. A fine example of efforts to provide information on students' progress and achievement was the valuable, formative, termly reports home.

In line with societal trends, the school had embraced the use of social media as a communications tool. An agreed framework, one that places an emphasis on the school's key qualities, should inform the preparation of all future social media communications. It was noted that aspects of the school website, a primary source of information for prospective parents and students, required updating.

Leading school development

Leadership of school development required improvement. To begin, the board should assume oversight of the realisation of key priorities. In support of this, key aspects for development should be collaboratively agreed and a corresponding action plan prepared. The establishment of complementary working groups, led by assistant principals and inclusive of all teachers, was also suggested. In line with the Education Act, 1998, the board should arrange for the compilation of a school plan and ensure regular review and updating.

The school was engaging with SSE, with a recent focus on feedback and student reflection. Outcomes had been appropriately captured in school improvement plans. Teachers' incorporation of SSE-informed strategies could however be strengthened. In addition to planned SSE around wellbeing promotion, it was suggested that established priorities be maintained and strengthened. This could be achieved through a focus on teaching and learning for wellbeing. To this end, teachers should reflect on how students can be supported to flourish in the classroom. A further focus on formative assessment would be valuable in this regard. In due course, the assessment policy should be updated. An ongoing focus on the impact of SSE-informed strategies was also advised.

Subject department planning was founded on very high levels of collegiality and collaboration. There was consistency in the approaches of different subject departments. The need to develop junior cycle units of learning that align with templates provided by Oíde was needed in a few subjects, and quite often the information offered in units of learning needed further development. In a small number of subjects there was valuable identification of key learning as well as associated assessment tasks, that had been commendably aligned to success criteria. This highly valuable approach was recommended for widespread adoption.

A digital learning plan, which was informed by the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 had been prepared. It included a commendable focus on both digital infrastructure and teaching and

learning. It was suggested that a linking of priorities in the digital plan, with both SSE priorities and, as relevant, development priorities, would be valuable.

Developing leadership capacity

The quality of the work to develop the leadership capacity of members of the school community was very good.

The senior leadership team fostered the leadership capacity of all staff. Distributed leadership was evident through the post structure, as well as through the involvement of many teachers in committees, extra-curricular activities and co-curricular pursuits. The assistant principals reported a sense of autonomy, and appreciated the opportunity provided annually to reflect on and review their work.

Staff were very well supported by both the patron and the board to undertake professional learning. Related engagements were founded on a desire to support quality teaching and learning for all and were informed by identified needs. Some consideration could be given to forecasting needs and the development of a corresponding systematic professional learning plan. Further thought could also be given to a more formal monitoring of the impact of engagements on teaching and learning.

The development of students' capacity to lead was also promoted and supported. An active student's council, the TY future leaders program, and the 'Cairde girls' mentoring program were significant in this space. Council members had engaged with senior leadership, collaborating productively to implement changes in students' daily lives. In addition to the intention to increase students' involvement in policy review and development, it would be good to explore further connections between the student council and both the board of management and the parents' association. Increasing students' awareness of their role in school decision-making, particularly around SSE, would also be beneficial. Additionally, students had the opportunity to develop related skills by participating in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities such as Green Schools, TY-led workshops for local primary schools, sports teams, musicals, and various clubs.

The school actively participated in the Droichead professional induction framework and provided placements for students participating in initial teacher education programs. The positive contribution of both to the school's culture of continuous learning and leadership development was appreciated by all.

The parents' council was being re-established. As the council takes shape, members should be kept informed of the board's work, be involved in the development and review of school policies, and be included, as relevant, in the realisation of key developmental priorities.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

The quality of the work to support and promote student wellbeing was very good. First and foremost school atmosphere was noted as most positive. Students' sense of connectedness, belonging and security was captured in sentiments shared by students including, for example, "it feels like one big family here".

The opportunities for social and emotional learning were significant, both within the classroom and beyond. The school had appropriately timetabled junior cycle Wellbeing, which included provision for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic Social & Political Education (CSPE), Physical Education (PE) and a Learning to Learn module. The additional provision for Health Education in both TY and fifth year demonstrated management's regard for related learning. There was scope for development in relation to provision for PE, Health Education and Guidance in senior cycle, and this should be informed by an inclusion and equality of access lens.

The contribution of the school's very full, inclusive and varied co-curricular and extra-curricular programme was also acknowledged for its positive contribution to promoting and supporting student wellbeing. The myriad of options available to students offered opportunities for the development of self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, responsible decision-making and social awareness.

The school's work to enhance wellbeing protective factors and minimise wellbeing risk factors had been captured in associated policies and implemented through an adherence to and consistent application of related protocols. This included provision of effective systems which sought to; ensure smooth transitions; monitor attendance and manage absenteeism, identify obstacles to progress and provide relevant support – personal, social or academic; celebrate successes and achievements; manage unacceptable behaviour; prevent and address bullying, and promote a positive school climate. The systematic approach to promoting student wellbeing in each of these areas helped all concerned to proactively support students and their families, especially when issues or difficulties emerged. A readiness to keep parents/guardians informed, and to include them as early as possible in the identification of remedial action, was also positive. All of this supported an underlying philosophy of prevention rather than cure.

Whole-staff commitment was very evident in this space, and this was captured in a well-developed whole-school guidance plan. There was a number of significant players and contributors including: the very accessible senior leadership team; the empathetic and focused guidance counsellor; the committed and experienced SEN and EAL co-ordinators; and the dedicated and supportive year heads. It is recommended that consideration be given to how senior leadership's schedule of weekly meetings might be adjusted to facilitate the identified key players to meet as a student support team.

The fact that year heads remained with their assigned year group across junior cycle, and again across senior cycle, was a positive addition to the school's work to promote and support student wellbeing. Class tutors also contributed, but the system in operation was not without its shortfalls. There was a related need, therefore, to consider how its effectiveness might be enhanced.

The principles of restorative practice had begun to inform the work of the school and this should be captured in the next review of the school's code of behaviour. Finally, opportunities to develop students' capacities to manage stress were also provided across subject areas.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	Provision that is very good is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board welcomes this very positive report which affirms the dedication, hard work and commitment of all members of the school community. The inspection was overall a positive and affirming experience and the board are pleased that many areas of best practice were acknowledged in the report by the inspectors.

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

The board and senior leadership team welcome the recommendations and will use them as a focus and pathway for further development of the school. The board can confirm that the new senior leadership team will be in place from 1 st September 2025.

Since the completion of the WSE-MLL, key staff have already begun reporting to the board at scheduled board meetings.

As part of the biennial post of responsibility review the board has, in conjunction with a working group from within the staff, overseen a restructuring of posts so as to account for recommendations in relation to SSE, policy development and development of a school plan.

The focus for subject planning for 2025/2026 will be on feedback, assessment & reporting.