



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Óige  
Department of Education  
and Youth

# Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning

## REPORT FOR SCHOOL RESPONSE

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Helen's Junior National School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Martello Portmarnock Co. Dublin
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	19578P
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	16/10/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	11/12/2025

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# 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 inspector(s) evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

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.

## 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>Bí Cineálta</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The name of the DLP and the child safeguarding statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS.</li><li>2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.</li><li>3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.</li><li>4. The school's child safeguarding statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2023 or the updated procedures 2025.</li><li>5. The minutes of the last three board of management meetings contain a child</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of Bí Cineálta, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it.</li><li>2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and pupils/students.</li><li>3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of Bí Cineálta<sup>1</sup>.</li><li>4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.</li><li>5. All staff visited report that they have read the school's Bí Cineálta policy and that they are aware of their roles and</li></ol>

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<p>protection oversight report in line with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2023 or the updated procedures 2025.</p> <p>6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2023 or the updated procedures 2025.</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>responsibilities in preventing and addressing bullying behaviour.</p>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

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# Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	14/10/25 - 16/10/2025
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team</li><li>• Meeting with representatives of the board of management</li><li>• Meeting with parent representatives</li><li>• Meetings with teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of parent and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of pupils' work</li><li>• Interaction with pupils</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives</li></ul>

## School context

St. Helen's Junior National School is a co-educational primary school located in Portmarnock, Co. Dublin and caters for pupils from junior infants to second class. The school has two special classes and one early intervention class for autistic pupils. The school is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. At the time of the evaluation, there were 318 pupils enrolled in the school. School staffing comprised an administrative principal, fourteen mainstream class teachers, three teachers for the autism classes and five special education teachers (SETs), one of whom is shared with another school.

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

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The quality of pupils' learning was very good; they were highly engaged, interested and motivated to learn.
- The quality of teaching was of a very high standard. All lessons were well structured and well resourced.
- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was of an excellent standard. All staff had a shared understanding of inclusion, and all worked collaboratively to support and motivate their pupils in a highly effective manner.
- Leadership and management were of an exceptionally high standard.
- The school demonstrated significant strengths in the implementation of its school self-evaluation processes.

### Recommendations

- All mainstream teachers should ensure that learning experiences across the curriculum include clear challenges and stimulate curiosity through inquiry-based approaches and collaborative group work.
- All teachers should ensure that in-class support is sufficiently targeted and monitored to ensure there is optimal impact for groups of pupils.

## Detailed findings and recommendations

### 1. The quality of pupils' learning

- The quality of pupils' learning was very good; they were highly engaged, interested and motivated to learn. Pupils' behaviour throughout the evaluation was excellent. A clear focus on skill development was evident across all classes, where the explicit teaching of skills and the effective transfer of skills were observed. For example, fundamental movement skills were explicitly taught and assessed during physical education lessons, and then purposefully applied as part of movement breaks between classes to support pupils' awareness of body regulation. Independent skills were particularly well supported and nurtured in the autism classes, where pupils were clearly responding to the high expectations set for them across the curriculum.
- Pupils shared competent and thoughtful contributions during classroom discussions. They connected with their prior learning and made meaningful links to new concepts. Multi-sensory learning experiences were implemented successfully and well supported during lessons. Learning in Mathematics was enhanced by the opportunities to relate to everyday life through pupils' "Maths Eyes." Pupils were supported to learn by doing and to articulate their understanding using mathematical language. This strengthened their capacity to use logic to understand, explain and justify their thinking. Mathematics journals were recently introduced across the school. While the rationale for their use was clear, greater clarity is needed to ensure they serve as a useful stimulus for all pupils.
- Writing was developed purposefully across a range of genres. It was highly commendable that in some classes, pupils were given the choice to write about topics that interested them. This enabled them to demonstrate their understanding of genre structure and to apply language features, grammar, and vocabulary independently. A variety of levelled fiction and non-fiction books, along with an emphasis on big books and novels supported pupils' interest, fluency and their curiosity in reading.
- Léirigh na daltaí dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge. D'úsáid na múinteoirí taispeántais le stór focal agus tús-abairtí go stuama le linn na gceachtanna chun tacú le tuiscint na ndaltaí agus úsáid na Gaeilge. Bhí Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil in úsáid i rith an lae, agus sna cásanna ba éifeachtaí, tugadh deiseanna do na daltaí cluichí a imirt a spreagadh iad chun páirt a ghlacadh agus brí a bhaint as labhairt, éisteacht agus tuiscint na Gaeilge. Is le fonn agus le líofacht a chuir na daltaí raon leathan dánta, rainn agus amhráin i láthair sa Ghaeilge agus sa Bhéarla. *Pupils demonstrated positive dispositions towards Irish. All teachers displayed charts with vocabulary and sentence stems and used these skilfully during lessons to support pupils' understanding and use of Irish. Informal Irish was used throughout the day, and where learning was most effective, pupils were given opportunities to play games that encouraged them to engage with and make sense of speaking, listening, and understanding Irish. Pupils recited a broad repertoire of poems and rhymes and sang songs with fluency and enthusiasm in both Irish and English.*
- It was highly commendable that the whole school decided to place less emphasis on textbooks in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education. This had resulted in the development of individual pupil portfolios, where pupils and teachers collaboratively selected topics of interest and relevance across the curriculum. These approaches provided regular opportunities for pupils to be creative and express their learning in diverse ways, including the use of graphic organisers, project presentations and labelled drawings.
- Assessment data, including checklists, work samples from a range of copybooks, standardised testing, tracking, and teacher-designed tests, demonstrated that pupils were progressing steadily in their learning. Pupils' assessment of their own strengths, interests and needs were collected through "My Thoughts About School" interviews and analysed by teachers to inform practice.

## 2. The quality of teaching

- The quality of teaching was of a very high standard. All lessons were well structured and well resourced. Teachers knew their pupils well and responded to emerging needs with whole-class and individualised strategies to support pupil engagement and progression. Transitions were managed very appropriately, supporting all pupils to move at key points during the lesson to support their engagement
- Teachers provided integrated learning experiences, enabling pupils to connect their learning across the curriculum. For example, a visual arts lesson incorporated dimensions and awareness of 2D-shapes; nursery rhymes in English were explored through Irish and social personal and health education topics explored teeth as part of self-care and wellbeing in one setting, while another class integrated the topic with water conservation. All teachers asked interesting and thought-provoking questions to prompt prior knowledge and build understanding. Where this was most effective, pupils were challenged to justify, explain their thoughts and refine their thinking both independently and collaboratively. All teachers should ensure that learning experiences across the curriculum include clear challenges and stimulate curiosity through inquiry-based approaches and collaborative group work.
- Pupils' achievements and learning were celebrated throughout the classrooms and corridors. All classroom environments shared classroom routines and displayed pupils' art and writing samples. Where practice was most successful, interesting and challenging vocabulary and open-ended questions were jointly agreed, displayed and used by pupils during oral and written contributions.
- Teacher preparation was highly effective, and all teachers planned collaboratively. Monthly records of teaching and learning, maintained by the school, demonstrated highly reflective practice and were used effectively to inform future planning for pupil progression. Whole-school approaches to key areas of priority were visible throughout the school. In surveys carried out with parents, almost all agreed that teaching was good in the school.
- All teachers placed particular emphasis on using copybooks for pupils to demonstrate understanding and learning through pictures, writing samples and graphic organisers. It was highly commendable that teachers provided detailed written feedback to pupils that affirmed their efforts. The school should now consider moving to one-to-one conferencing, where teachers and pupils agree what is working well and co-construct the pupils' next steps in their learning. Opportunities for the pupil to implement these targets should be provided and inform future feedback; this will support pupils' ownership of learning for themselves.
- Teaching in the special education settings was very collaborative and implemented flexibly to support pupils' needs. The staged approach to provision for pupils with special educational needs was well established. Teachers implemented a variety of support models effectively based on the profiled needs of classes. All teachers collaborated well to further develop team teaching. There is a need for teachers to target groups of pupils more precisely during in-class support to ensure there is optimal impact for those pupils. Comprehensive student support plans were compiled for pupils and included detailed reviews. The number of learning targets in a small number of plans should be reduced to target priority-learning needs. It was evident that the school's process for target setting has become clearer in recent cycles. Student-support plans in the autism classes included an emphasis on inclusion in mainstream classes that was highly appropriate, engaging, inclusive and very well organised.

### 3. The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing

- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was of an excellent standard. All staff had a shared vision and understanding centred on inclusion and the holistic development of pupils. They all worked collaboratively to support and motivate their pupils in a highly effective manner. Teachers recognised, affirmed and celebrated pupils' achievements. This was a feature in all classes visited, through incidental conversations in the yard or in the corridor, upon arrival and dismissal times, during assembly time and through corridor and classroom displays.
- Pupils' sense of leadership was supported successfully through the Green School Committee and daily classroom responsibilities allocated. Pupils demonstrated a strong commitment to these roles. The school, as noted in the School Improvement Plan, will enhance pupil voice further in the school's decision-making processes through a variety of means, including the establishment of a pupil council.
- Transitions into the primary school and to the senior school were very well planned and all efforts to ensure familiarity, appropriate transfer of information and collaboration were in place.
- Strong links had been developed and nurtured with parents, the local community and outside agencies. A home-school communication form that issued to parents two weeks prior to the parent-teacher meetings was an important contributor to the meetings and demonstrated the school's inclusion of parent voice. The school had established a wide range of in-school and after-school activities to enhance pupils' wellbeing; these included sporting events and clubs. Almost all parents agreed that their child was treated fairly, respectfully and was well looked after in the school.

### 4. The quality of leadership and management

- Leadership and management were of an exceptionally high standard. The principal's vision, commitment and professionalism were visible across all aspects of the school's environment and culture. She fostered highly effective relations and a strong emphasis on shared responsibility and collaboration.
- The principal was very ably supported by the deputy principal and school leaders who together fostered professional collaboration, innovation, continuous improvement and evidence-based practice. Teachers who led initiatives that enhanced whole-school development ensured they were evidence based, piloted and monitored to align with expected outcomes in pupils' learning. A member of the leadership and management team supported staff to engage in collaborative planning, professional dialogue and used assessment data to inform targeted interventions. Staff engaged in ongoing professional learning, ensuring that teaching practices remained evidence based and responsive to pupils' needs.
- Survey data indicated that all teachers agreed that the school was well run, that their views were valued in decision-making processes and that there was a good atmosphere in the school.
- The board of management supported the school's inclusive ethos actively and was committed to ensuring high-quality educational experiences for all pupils. Board members supported school initiatives competently and demonstrated an exceptional understanding of all aspects of the school.
- The parents' association played a valuable role in the life of the school, contributing to the school's decision-making processes and to events, building community and supporting school-wide initiatives. They described the strong community links that the school had fostered and the welcoming atmosphere that all staff promoted. They commended the detailed termly newsletters from the principal and whole-school use of an online learning platform to share insights into the children's learning experiences and outcomes.

- Procedures to support the mentoring and induction of teachers were well established. The school reported that it provided placements for student teachers regularly.

## 5. The quality of school self-evaluation

- The school demonstrated notable strengths in the implementation of its school self-evaluation processes. Leaders and teachers used the SSE process skilfully to support school improvement. The school improvement plans were very comprehensive and addressed many priority areas, which impacted positively on pupils' learning outcomes and experiences.
- The current cycle of SSE highlighted wellbeing in the school as a focus area for further development. Commendably, the school had identified strengths and areas for improvement under the four pillars of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2023*. The school was in the process of implementing a range of actions, including expansion of wellbeing spaces and enhancing outdoor areas such as a sensory garden.
- Priority areas identified for the SSE process were weaved effectively into all appropriate whole-school plans and policies, which contributed to a shared understanding for implementation amongst all staff.

## 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
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Provision that is excellent</b> 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
<b>Very good</b>	<b>Provision that is very good</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Provision that is good</b> 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
<b>Requires improvement to achieve a good standard</b>	<b>Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard</b> 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
<b>Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard</b>	<b>Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard</b> 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