



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Bunscoil na Cathrach
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Cahir Co. Tipperary
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	20560D
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	24-11-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	22/04/2024

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. 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.

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	<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> and this policy is reviewed annually.2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the <i>Procedures</i>) since the previous report to the board.3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils.4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.5. All teachers visited report that they have read the school's policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying.

<p>Child Protection Procedures for Primary 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.

Date of inspection	24-11-2023
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team• Meeting with representatives of the board of management• Meeting with parent representatives• Meetings with teachers• Meeting with special education teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Pupil focus group• Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of pupils' work• Interaction with pupils• Post-evaluation meeting

School context

Bunscoil na Cathrach is a co-educational primary school which opened in June 2022 following the amalgamation of Cahir Boys National School and SN Mhuire na Trócaire. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. At the time of the evaluation there were 429 pupils enrolled. The school had a staffing of an administrative principal, sixteen mainstream class teachers, two special class teachers and seven special education teachers (SETs). Another SET was shared with a local school and two teachers were assigned to support pupils for whom English was an additional language. Bunscoil na Cathrach also had a home-school community liaison co-ordinator and the school was the base for three substitute teacher supply-panel posts. The school was participating in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of pupils' learning was good overall. Pupils demonstrated a good knowledge and awareness of the culture and historical heritage of their locality.
- Teaching in mainstream and special education settings was good overall, with practice observed ranging from satisfactory to very good.
- The quality of wellbeing was very good; school staff promoted a caring and respectful environment for pupils.
- The quality of leadership and management was good overall. The board of management was supportive of the school.
- Overall the quality of whole-school planning was satisfactory. The school's DEIS Action planning process required additional development.

Recommendations

- Teachers should ensure that in-class support is informed by assessment data to ensure that learning opportunities are maximised for pupils.
- School management in consultation with teachers should, on a phased basis, continue to implement the collaborative review and updating of curricular plans and school policies to ensure that they reflect the current school context and guide whole-school practice.
- School management should establish structures to include the views of all stakeholders in the DEIS Action planning process.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning

- The overall quality of learning was good. Pupils presented as enthusiastic, interested learners who engaged and persisted in tasks presented. They contributed confidently to class discussions; interactions were observed to be positive, respectful and conducive to wellbeing.
- During station teaching in the junior classes, most pupils successfully engaged with the learning activities provided. Vocabulary was being developed in relation to identified themes and used successfully during child-led interactions. Pupils' appreciation of poetry was evident in the variety of rhymes and poems recited capably and competently by the junior classes, while the senior classes had explored a rich range of historically and culturally significant poetry. Pupils had access to a wide variety of reading materials and they spoke confidently about their reading preferences. Good attention was paid to pupils' presentation of written work in some classes. In the middle classes the pupils described the enjoyment they derived from engagement with a writing workshop. There was scope to further embed the teaching of writing genres across the school.
- Pupils enjoyed playful and engaging learning experiences in Mathematics. They were developing good mathematical language and mental maths strategies. Concrete materials were used consistently to good effect to support understanding of concepts. In examples of highly effective practice, the pupils had opportunities to explain their reasoning during problem-solving tasks. This good practice should be extended across the school. In some lessons the pupils also had opportunities to meaningfully connect their learning with real-life.
- *Sna ranganna inar breathnaíodh múineadh na Gaeilge, chothaigh na múinteoirí meon dearfach i leith na Gaeilge. Ar an iomlán bhí na daltaí in ann rannta agus dánta a rá le brí agus le fonn. Ba chóir an cur chuige cumarsáideach a úsáid go leanúnach i ngach rang chun scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a fhorbairt agus a threisiú. In the classes where the teaching of Irish was observed, the teachers promoted a positive attitude to Irish. The pupils recited rhymes and poems with meaning and enthusiasm. The communicative approach should be used on an ongoing basis to enable pupils to develop and strengthen their language skills.*
- During discussions of significant historical events, the pupils demonstrated a good knowledge and awareness of the culture and historical heritage of their locality. In one class setting Geography was effectively integrated with Gaeilge and this approach strongly consolidated pupils' geographical knowledge and communicative capacity in Irish. Pupils took great pride in describing highly memorable learning experiences and the rich ranges of activities provided for them in Science Week. These included their engagement with a guest speaker, a Science workshop, Science shows and coding activities. In some classes pupils had participated in valuable project work across a wide range of topics.
- Pupils' creativity and individuality was successfully fostered through their exploration of the Arts. Their work in Visual Arts was attractively displayed throughout the school. Engagement in role-play during Drama positively contributed to the pupils' ability to empathise and identify with fictional characters. Pupils in senior classes had engaged in musical composition.
- In the pupil focus group discussion the pupils reported on their participation in co-curricular activities such as World Book Day, visiting the local library, a maths competition and a horticultural project.
- Almost all parents who responded to a survey issued as part of the evaluation agreed that their children enjoyed school and they are doing well in school.

2. The quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching across mainstream and special classes, and special education settings was good with practice observed ranging from satisfactory to very good. Teachers established supportive, affirming learning environments and lessons were generally well-structured. In some settings the intended learning outcomes were shared with pupils and revisited at the end of lessons. This enabled pupils to consolidate their understanding of concepts explored and experience a sense of making progress in their learning. There was scope to extend this good practice across the school.
- Teachers used a range of methodologies to capture pupils' interest and maintain their engagement. Approaches included whole-class discussion, collaborative pair and group work, story, active learning and direct teaching. Effective teacher questioning was used to activate pupils' prior knowledge and enabled them to make connections with their learning across many curricular areas such as Mathematics, Geography, Irish and English.
- The quality of teachers' individual recorded preparation varied. Where teacher preparation was highly effective, the learning outcomes were identified and this provided clarity for lessons while contributing to continuity and progression in pupils' learning. It is advised that planning processes be further developed to ensure whole-school continuity in curriculum delivery and to support effective collaborative practice.
- Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) were supported through a combination of in-class and withdrawal support. In some lessons observed, provision during in-class support was not focused sufficiently towards meeting pupils' priority learning needs. It is recommended that in-class support is informed by assessment data to ensure that learning opportunities are maximised for pupils.
- A wide variety of assessment practices was in place across the school. These included the use of teacher observation, standardised tests, teacher-designed tests, pupil portfolios and termly assessments. In some settings assessment data had been analysed in a way that was easy to interpret and share, thus optimising the impact of this data on teaching and learning. It is advised that teachers now agree and implement a whole-school approach to assessment to further inform teaching and learning.

3. The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing

- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was very good. The school staff promoted a caring and respectful environment for all pupils. It was evident that pupils experienced a sense of belonging to the school community.
- Classrooms and support rooms were positive and welcoming environments. Almost all parents who responded to the survey reported that there was a good atmosphere and that they felt welcome in the school.
- Pupils' wellbeing was promoted through their engagement with programmes and initiatives such as developing the school garden, partaking in community projects, sporting, musical and artistic activities.
- During the focus group interview, pupils demonstrated an interest in further opportunities for pupil leadership. It was reported that the school will establish a student council later in the year.
- School leadership stated that it had good connections with local post primary schools and that a reading initiative which supported transitions from primary school had been implemented.

4. The quality of leadership and management

- Overall the quality of leadership and management was good. The board of management was supportive of the newly amalgamated school.
- The principal demonstrated a strong vision and commitment to the ongoing development of the school. He was ably supported by the in-school leadership team, some members of which had been recently appointed. Together they were focused on promoting a calm, caring and nurturing learning environment.
- School management in consultation with teachers should, on a phased basis, continue to implement the collaborative review and updating of curricular plans and school policies to ensure that they reflect the current school context and guide whole-school practice. Mechanisms should be put in place to gather and incorporate parent and pupil views to support policy development.
- Representatives of the parents' association who met with the inspectors confirmed that it was committed to building strong links with the community.
- The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcomed and is included among the standards of the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers as it can provide valuable benefits for teachers, student teachers, pupils and teacher education institutions.

5. The quality of school self-evaluation

- School self-evaluation (SSE) was of a satisfactory quality. A DEIS Action Plan had been developed to inform aspects of school life. While the plan documented an element of consultation in its formulation, there was scope to further develop the collaborative process and incorporate the views of all stakeholders in identifying priority areas for development. Baseline data should be established to facilitate the development of specific, measurable and time-bound targets.
- Partnerships with parents were strengthened through a range of innovative projects and the school has identified parental engagement as an area for further development.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

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

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	<i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	<i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management and school community of Bunscoil na Cathrach recognise the professional commitment to this inspection, the report and recommendations which will be incorporated into our future work.

Given that the school has amalgamated since June 2022 the recommendations give a direction to the principal, teachers, staff and parents' council for the coming years. As a new school, curricular development and progression on pupil wellbeing are core activities.

The school aims to develop a collaborative approach as we develop and implement the DEIS action plan, establish pupil voice through the students' council and engage with the parent community.

The inspection process was a positive, professional experience for all involved, providing a direction for future development.

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

Teachers will aim to develop the use of assessment data through the year to maximise pupil learning opportunities and outcomes through agreed assessment practices, supported by SET teachers using the NEPS Support File system. Such assessment practices will incorporate the agreed approaches from NCCA, NCSE and other relevant agencies.

Collaborative review and the development of curricular plans are ongoing, through the appointment of posts of responsibilities, use of staff meetings and collaborative groups, including pupils and parents with presentation to Board of documents for ratification. With the development of a new curriculum this updating is timely and necessary.

Developing a joint stakeholder approach for the development of the DEIS action plan involves the appointment of a DEIS co-ordinator, the establishment of a DEIS committee with relevant staff and using the home school community liaison role to incorporate parent involvement in the 6 themes of DEIS.

The commencement of the students' council will establish a more formal pupil voice and ongoing work with the parents' council will benefit the school community.

The Board of Management meet regularly to support the ongoing work in the school, provide direction and make decisions on the future development of the school. This work will continue to nurture this new opportunity for all the pupils in Cahir.

The school community of Bunscoil na Cathrach looks forward to the development of our school in the coming years. The pupils of our community deserve the best we can give them and provide the opportunities for learning that help them grow into motivated young adults for the world ahead of them.