An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning

Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Spa National School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Ballygarron Spa Tralee
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	18702I
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	09/05/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	17/06/2024

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

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

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>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).</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) or Bí Cineálta (2024) 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.</td></tr>
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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, (revised 2023). 7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE). 8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.	

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Date of inspection	09/05/2024
Inspection activities undertaken • Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team • Meeting with representatives of the board of management • Meeting with parent representatives • Meetings with teachers • 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 • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives

School context

Spa National School is a co-educational primary school in Spa, Co Kerry. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Kerry. At the time of the evaluation, there were 224 pupils enrolled in the school. There were sixteeen teachers employed, including an administrative principal and nine mainstream class teachers. Staffing also included six special education teachers (SETs), two of whom were not based in the school and two were job sharing.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of pupils' learning was very good; pupils demonstrated very positive dispositions towards their learning and contributed confidently to class discussions.
- The overall quality of teachers' practice was highly effective with some exemplary practices observed.
- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was outstanding; pupils had developed a positive image of themselves as capable, confident learners.
- Leadership and management were exemplary; all stakeholders demonstrated a strong commitment to the school. The principal and teachers led a culture of collaboration, reflective practice and progression.
- The parents' association provided valuable support to the school and their work had a positive impact on learning experiences.
- Approaches to school self-evaluation (SSE) were exemplary.

Recommendations

- Teachers should collaboratively review the structure of station teaching to ensure that an appropriate timeframe, pre and post-testing and effective use of teaching resources are used to maximise pupils' learning.
- To enhance highly commendable teaching practices more opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively is advised.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning

- The quality of pupils' learning was very good; pupils demonstrated very positive dispositions towards their learning and contributed confidently to class discussions. They listened respectfully to the opinions of their peers and displayed high levels of curiosity through the questions they posed.
- A broad range of stimulating and high-quality learning experiences was provided for pupils throughout the school. The school's outdoor environment was very well developed and used as a resource to support learning in co-curricular activities. The local area had been used very effectively to teach History, Science and Geography with specific learning experiences and outcomes identified for each class group.
- In Mathematics, pupils participated actively in whole-class discussions and were observed to use mathematical language efficiently to communicate, justify and defend their thinking. At all levels pupils used concrete materials to investigate concepts, model processes and represent their ideas. Open-ended tasks provided pupils with meaningful opportunities to think critically.
- The quality of pupils' literacy and oral language skills was very good. Pupils showed very good understanding of writing genres. In senior classes, they drafted and edited their work. Their knowledge of the reading process was well developed. Pupils were encouraged to read a range of books through a graded reading system in the junior classes and an individualised reading programme in the senior classes. A differentiated spelling programme was also in place.
- Ghlac daltaí páirt go fonnmhar ina gcuid eispéiris fhoghlama sa Ghaeilge. Léirigh siad inniúlacht oiriúnach ina gcuid scileanna teanga bunúsacha. Bhí réimse leathan foclóra ar eolas acu agus is le fonn a chuir tromlach de na daltaí réimse dánta agus amhrán i láthair. Múineadh foclóir Gaeilge go cruinn agus bhí go leor deiseanna ag na daltaí an Ghaeilge a úsáid go rialta i rith an lae. *Pupils participated enthusiastically in their learning experiences in Irish. They demonstrated suitable proficiency in their basic Irish language skills. They had a broad range of vocabulary and they performed a range of poetry and song with enthusiasm. Vocabulary was taught accurately, and pupils had ample opportunities to use Irish regularly.*
- The quality of learner outcomes in the Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) subjects was very good. The lessons observed involved discovery and inquiry-based learning and opportunities to justify and discuss new concepts.
- Music and Visual Arts lessons were highly creative and pupils demonstrated appropriate levels of understanding and skill development. Pupils listened and responded to a variety of musical genres. They made use of imaginative and structured approaches to experiment and create pieces of art using a range of materials. Pupils' artwork was celebrated and showcased throughout the school.
- In most classrooms, pupils recorded their knowledge very effectively using varied media, including posters, copybooks and projects. Pupils engaged with online platforms for research-based project work. It is advised that school leaders ensure that this very good practice of using digital technologies to support learning is extended across all settings in the school. In the parent responses to surveys, almost all agreed that their child was doing well in school.
- A notable strength of the school was the provision of a wide range of co-curricular activities to enhance pupils' learning experiences and wellbeing. These included student enterprise projects, Green Schools Committee, Donal Walsh Day, quiz and debating teams and many sporting activities. The pupils in the focus group spoke with great enthusiasm about the wide variety of learning experiences that they enjoyed. Examples included digital portfolios, engaging in the Modern Languages programme, school assemblies and friendship workshops. They spoke highly of their teachers and the support they received from them in school.

- The whole-school emphasis on pupils' fundamental movement skills and regular movement breaks has enabled pupils to develop the motivation, confidence and physical competence to fully engage with their Physical Education curriculum.
- The school was very successful in forging strong connections with other primary and secondary schools as well as the local Munster Technology University, all of which enhanced the learning opportunities and experiences of the pupils.

2. The quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching was very good and some lessons observed were exemplary. Teachers demonstrated very good classroom management skills. They planned and prepared for lessons meticulously. Teachers provided affirming learning environments which were bright and welcoming with displays featuring pupils' work and useful materials to support current learning. In the survey completed during the inspection, almost all pupils confirmed that the teachers taught in ways that helped them to learn and improve on their work.
- Where practice was exemplary, teachers adopted an integrated approach to teaching and connected pupils' learning across the curriculum effectively. Where outstanding practice was observed, teachers clearly linked new concepts to pupils' previous learning. Teachers used a range of methodologies effectively, including group work, pair work, and talk and discussion. To enhance highly commendable teaching practices the provision of more opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively is advised.
- There was a range of practice evident in relation to differentiation. In settings where very effective practice was observed, teachers had designed differentiated tasks that included an element of choice and pupils showed sustained resilience in their engagement in tasks. To meet the range of pupils' needs more fully, it is advised that all teachers plan and deliver tasks that provide suitable levels of support and challenge to pupils.
- Teaching for pupils in special education needs (SEN) settings was of a very high quality. A variety of practices was observed including in-class support, station teaching, and withdrawal of pupils. It is recommended that teachers collaboratively review the structure of station teaching to ensure that an appropriate timeframe, pre and post-testing and effective use of teaching resources are used to maximise pupils' learning. All SET rooms were well resourced and had environments that enhanced and scaffolded pupils' learning. Teachers collaboratively devised useful support plans. They analysed assessment data to inform programmes of work for pupils. The SETs had formed very positive relationships with their pupils and were attentive to their academic and emotional needs. SETs communicated frequently with parents and established very strong links with external agencies. Commendably, the resent installation of the agility trail was proving very beneficial for pupils.
- The quality of assessment was very good overall and teachers used assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning. A range of practices were observed including self-assessment, teacher designed tests and observations, conferencing and formative feedback in copybooks. More opportunities should be provided for pupils to discuss and reflect on their learning by developing a greater range of pupil-led and peer-assessment strategies.

3. The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing

- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was outstanding; pupils had developed a positive image of themselves as capable, confident learners. A welcoming and inclusive school culture was evident during the evaluation. The school had implemented an innovative range of approaches to wellbeing promotion which included the use of a

pupil suggestion box, wellbeing week, anti-bullying workshops, the development of a sensory room and the addition of two school hens. Pupils were also involved in creating a biodiversity garden and an emphasis was placed on pupils' appreciation of their community through outings to local historical sites. A students' council was in place which promoted pupil voice and participation.

- It was evident during classroom observations and interactions with pupils that they had a great sense of pride in their school and a strong sense of belonging to the local community.
- School staff modelled openness, respect and listening in their interactions with each other and with pupils. During the evaluation pupils were observed to engage happily in their work and could identify how their views were acknowledged and valued by the school.
- The school had embraced the benefits of outdoor learning and pupils proudly spoke about their school garden and outdoor classroom. They enthusiastically described how the use of their play area positively contributed to their physical development, their connection with nature and their enhanced friendships with each other.

4. The quality of leadership and management

- Leadership and management were exemplary; all stakeholders demonstrated a strong commitment to the school. The principal and teachers led a culture of collaboration, reflective practice and progression. The principal was highly organised. He effectively communicated his clear vision for the school. He demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities and commitment in providing an inclusive, nurturing and child-centred learning environment. He also adopted a systematic approach to the review and development of plans and policies. Of the parents who responded to the parental survey as part of the inspection, all agreed that there was a good atmosphere in the school and that it was well run.
- It was evident that the board of management provided very effective support to the school. The chairperson along with other board members demonstrated a clear understanding of his role and a commitment to nurturing the holistic development of the pupils with a particular emphasis on maintaining links with the local community. The board was astute in recently securing additional land which has greatly enhanced school facilities as well as safeguarding the school site for the future. It is advised the board consider more effective avenues for keeping teachers informed about its' leadership and management role.
- Commendably, the duties of the in-school leadership team were collaboratively agreed and were reflective of the identified needs of the school. Regular meetings of the leadership team facilitated ongoing reflection and discussion about progressing improvements in teaching and learning. Each post holder was highly committed to their work. They were assigned a list of duties which were reviewed on a regular basis.
- The parents' association worked very effectively to promote high-quality partnerships between home and school and took an active role in progressing identified areas for improvement by promoting participation in parental survey. They were very active in creating strong links between the school and the local community.
- Teachers demonstrated an ongoing commitment to targeted professional learning and the effective sharing of expertise to support improvements in provision at both individual and collective levels.
- 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 professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, student teachers, pupils and teacher education institution.

5. The quality of school self-evaluation

- Approaches to SSE were exemplary. School leaders skilfully used the SSE process to identify and address school priorities. The leadership team worked closely with staff members and led committees to promote school improvement. They gathered evidence and analysed data to inform appropriate target setting and effective action planning. This current focus for SSE was wellbeing. School leaders effectively used the pillars of the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice as a useful guide to direct this work.
- Previous cycles of SSE focused on Irish. It was evident throughout the evaluation that this had impacted very positively on teachers' practice and on learner outcomes and experiences.

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