An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

# Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning

## REPORT

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| Ainm na scoile/School name | S N Rath Dubh |
| Seoladh na scoile/School address | Rathduff<br>Grenagh<br>Co. Cork |
| Uimhir rolla/Roll number | 08393P |
| Dáta na cigireachta/<br>Date of evaluation | 18/05/2026 - 20/05/2026 |
| Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report | 29/09/2026 |

# 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.

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.

### 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.

## 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>Bí Cineálta</td></tr>
<tr><td>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.<br>2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.<br>3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.<br>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.<br>5. The minutes of the last three board of management meetings contain a child</td><td>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.<br>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.<br>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.<br>4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.<br>5. All staff visited report that they have read the school's Bí Cineálta policy and that they are aware of their roles and</td></tr>
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| 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.<br>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.<br>7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE)<br>8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location | responsibilities in preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. |

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

# Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

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| **Dates of inspection** | 18/05/2026 – 20/05/2026 |
| **Inspection activities undertaken**<br>• Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team<br>• Meeting with representatives of the board of management<br>• Meeting with parent representatives<br>• Meetings with teachers<br>• Review of relevant documents<br>• Pupil focus group | • Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires<br>• Observation of teaching and learning<br>• Examination of pupils' work<br>• Interaction with pupils<br>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives |

## School context

Rathduff National School is a rural co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cloyne. At the time of the evaluation, the school had a staffing of an administrative principal, eight mainstream teachers, five special education teachers and four teachers in classes for pupils with autism. There were 199 pupils enrolled in the school at the time of the evaluation. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a sample of settings.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The overall quality of pupils' learning was very good, with pupils demonstrating high levels of engagement, knowledge, skills and understanding across a broad range of curriculum areas.
- The overall quality of teaching across the school was very good, characterised by effective methodologies, purposeful learning experiences and highly supportive classroom environments.
- The school's provision for pupils' wellbeing was of a very good quality and reflected a strong commitment to inclusion, care and the holistic development of pupils.
- Leadership and management were of a very high quality and promoted a collaborative culture focused on continuous improvement and inclusion.
- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) was very good.

### Recommendations

- Teachers should continue to develop the consistent use of disciplinary and subject-specific language across classrooms in order to support pupils in articulating their understanding and applying curriculum-specific vocabulary confidently across a range of learning contexts.
- Targets within school support plans should be refined further to ensure greater specificity, measurability, incremental progression and clarity of timeframe, to support effective monitoring of progress and learning outcomes for pupils receiving additional support.

# Detailed findings and recommendations

## 1. The quality of pupils' learning

- The overall quality of pupils' learning was very good across a broad range of curriculum areas. Pupils were engaged, motivated and demonstrated appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding in the lessons observed. Their motivation to learn was often linked to teachers clearly communicating the focus of learning. In subjects such as Mathematics and Science, pupils demonstrated critical thinking and problem-solving skills and applied their learning in practical and real-life contexts. While differentiation supported pupils' participation and progress in a number of learning settings, opportunities to provide differentiated learning experiences should now be extended more consistently across all learning settings.

- Pupils were provided with a broad range of stimulating and high-quality learning experiences across the school. An integrated approach to learning was evident in most classrooms and this supported pupils in making meaningful connections across curriculum areas. Opportunities for independent and collaborative learning were provided regularly and pupils contributed confidently to classroom discussions while demonstrating respect for the views of others.

- In Mathematics, pupils demonstrated a secure knowledge of mathematical operations and number facts, supported effectively through the use of concrete materials and other appropriate resources. Lessons reflected a worthwhile emphasis on mathematical reasoning, with pupils given opportunities to explain their thinking, use mathematical language accurately and apply their learning in meaningful real-life contexts. Pupils engaged positively in a range of hands-on activities, including mathematical games, which enhanced their enjoyment of the subject. In the most effective lessons, rich mathematical discussions promoted deeper understanding and supported pupils in extending and applying their knowledge in more complex contexts. To build on this effective practice, opportunities for collaborative mathematical problem-solving should now be provided more consistently across all classrooms.

- Pupils' literacy skills were developed very effectively throughout the school through a broad range of high-quality teaching approaches. In the infant classrooms, pupils demonstrated very good development in early literacy skills, including phonological and phonemic awareness, and effective practices supported their progression from emergent to independent writing. Across the school, pupils engaged with appropriately challenging reading material, including class novels, which were used very effectively to promote reading fluency, comprehension and enjoyment. Pupils contributed to the selection of books within classroom libraries, fostering positive attitudes towards reading. In the most effective lessons, teachers skilfully modelled and explicitly taught a range of comprehension strategies, enabling pupils to engage purposefully with texts, demonstrate well-developed comprehension skills and respond confidently to higher-order questioning.

- Sna ranganna inar breathnaíodh múineadh na Gaeilge, chothaigh múinteoirí meon dearfach i leith na teanga agus chruthaigh siad timpeallachtaí foghlama a spreag úsáid nádúrtha na Gaeilge. Bhí Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil le cloisteáil go rialta i rith an lae, agus i bhformhór na ranganna, tugadh deiseanna fiúntacha do dhaltaí an teanga a úsáid go muiníneach eatarthu féin. Sna bunranganna, baineadh úsáid éifeachtach as cluichí teanga agus frásaí úsáideacha chun forbairt na teanga labhartha a chur chun cinn. Forbraíodh scileanna scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí go córasach, ó scríobh abairtí simplí go cumadóireacht. B'fhiú anois tógáil ar an dea-chleachtas seo trí chur chuige níos comhtháite a fhorbairt idir scríbhneoireacht an Bhéarla agus na Gaeilge, chun tacú le

haistriú agus le traschur scileanna scríbhneoireachta idir an dá theanga. *In the lessons where Irish was taught, teachers fostered a positive attitude towards the language and created learning environments that encouraged its natural use. Informal Irish was heard regularly throughout the school day, and in most classrooms, pupils were provided with worthwhile opportunities to use the language confidently with one another. In the junior classes, language games and useful phrases were used effectively to support the development of oral language skills. Pupils' writing skills were developed systematically, progressing from the writing of simple sentences to more extended composition. It would now be worthwhile to build on this good practice by developing a more integrated approach between English and Irish writing, in order to support the transfer and application of writing skills across both languages.*

- Pupils engaged enthusiastically in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Visual Arts and Music. They spoke confidently about their own artwork and the artwork of others, which was displayed throughout the school. Most pupils discussed aspects of their learning in SESE confidently; however, in some settings, pupils were less familiar with the subject-specific disciplinary language associated with particular themes and skills. To strengthen pupils' understanding further, opportunities should now be provided more consistently for pupils to use and apply subject-specific vocabulary across a range of learning contexts.

## 2. The quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching across the school was very good. Teachers demonstrated highly effective classroom management and almost all lessons observed reflected thorough preparation, purposeful organisation and well-structured learning experiences. A consistent whole-school approach to planning and preparation was evident, with a clear focus on learning. Teachers employed a broad range of methodologies effectively, including active learning approaches, collaborative learning opportunities and purposeful questioning, which contributed positively to pupils' engagement and participation. Classrooms were well organised and stimulating learning environments were created through the effective use of visual displays, pupils' work and, in some settings, disciplinary and subject-specific vocabulary displays. To build further on this good practice, disciplinary and subject-specific language displays should now be developed more consistently across all classrooms to support pupils in consolidating and applying new learning.

- Teachers engaged purposefully in continuous professional learning and demonstrated a strong commitment to collaborative practice across the school. Staff had participated in a broad range of professional learning opportunities. This professional learning was reflected positively in classroom practice and supported the development of inclusive and responsive teaching approaches throughout the school. Collaborative practices, including team-teaching and station-teaching approaches, were implemented effectively and enabled teachers to share expertise and support pupils' learning in a purposeful manner. Evidence gathered during the evaluation, including parent questionnaire responses, indicated that parents were highly satisfied with the quality of teaching and agreed that the school was supporting their children's learning effectively across a broad range of curricular areas.

- Pupils with identified needs received a combination of in-class and withdrawal support. Early intervention focused appropriately on literacy, communication, phonological awareness and fine motor development. Teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of inclusive and autism-friendly practice and used evidence-informed approaches to support pupils' learning and wellbeing. Learning environments were

carefully designed to support pupils' sensory and emotional needs through visual supports, calming spaces and predictable routines. The school demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusion through collaborative engagement with parents and relevant professionals in the development and review of individualised support plans. To build further on this effective practice, targets within school support plans should be more specific, incremental and time-bound to support clearer progression and more effective monitoring of pupils' learning and development.

- The overall quality of assessment across the school was good, with some highly effective practices observed. A broad range of assessment approaches was used to support teaching and learning, including standardised testing, teacher-designed assessments, task-based activities and ongoing monitoring of pupils' work. Diagnostic assessments were used appropriately in some settings to support the identification of pupils' learning needs and inform targeted interventions. Particularly effective practice included the purposeful use of self-assessment and peer-assessment strategies, together with comprehensive tracking of pupils' skill development across a range of curricular areas. To build on this very good practice, approaches to self-assessment and peer-assessment should now be developed incrementally as pupils progress through the school, enabling them to reflect more effectively on their learning, identify areas for improvement and take greater ownership of their progress as independent learners.

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

- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was a significant strength of the school. The school provided a welcoming, inclusive and highly supportive environment in which pupils were valued and cared for. A strong commitment to wellbeing was evident throughout all aspects of school life and staff worked collaboratively to promote pupils' social, emotional and physical development. The school engaged in a range of initiatives, including the Amber Flag, Active School Flag and other programmes that supported pupils' wellbeing. Additional supports, such as movement breaks, sensory pods, wellbeing gardens and calm, structured routines at the beginning of the school day, further enhanced pupils' experiences. Evidence gathered during the evaluation, including parent questionnaire responses and meetings with representatives of the parents' association, indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the school's atmosphere and the quality of care provided.

- School staff actively promoted pupil voice, participation and leadership. Pupils engaged meaningfully in a range of initiatives and wellbeing activities. They were provided with worthwhile opportunities to contribute to decision-making in aspects of school life, including the school environment and the selection of resources. This effective practice supported pupils in developing confidence, responsibility, leadership skills and positive relationships with their peers.

## 4. The quality of leadership and management

- The overall quality of leadership and management was of a very high standard. Leadership within the school promoted a strong commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of pupils. The board of management fulfilled its responsibilities very effectively and demonstrated a clear commitment to the ongoing

development of the school. Board members were well informed regarding priorities for school improvement and supported the progression of identified priorities effectively. The board also demonstrated a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of the in-school leadership team.

- The principal demonstrated highly effective leadership and organisational skills and carried out the role with a high level of commitment. Very positive and respectful relationships were evident across the school community, and the principal demonstrated a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. He was supported by a highly capable in-school leadership team, and a strong culture of distributed leadership was evident. Staff were encouraged to assume leadership roles, including leading curriculum initiatives and contributing collaboratively to whole-school development.

- 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 provides valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, pupils and teacher education institutions.

## 5. The quality of school self-evaluation

- The quality of SSE was very good. In recent years, the school had prioritised pupils' wellbeing as a key focus of the SSE process. School management and staff engaged collaboratively in gathering and analysing a range of evidence, including surveys and feedback from pupils to inform improvement planning. This evidence-informed approach enabled the school to identify strengths, monitor progress and respond effectively to areas for development. A broad range of wellbeing initiatives had been implemented successfully and there was clear evidence of their positive impact on pupils' experiences within the school. Progress was reviewed regularly and findings were communicated appropriately with the wider school community.

## 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 |