An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Curriculum Evaluation: Language and Communication REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Scoil Bernadette Special School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Bonnington, Montenotte, Co. Cork.
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	18458A
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	06/03/2026
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	03/09/2026

What is a curriculum evaluation?

Curriculum evaluations currently report on the quality of teaching and learning in specific subjects and curriculum areas of the Primary School Curriculum (1999), and the redeveloped Primary Curriculum (2025). They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject or curriculum area in the school.

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.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated learning and teaching in Language and Communication under the following headings:

1. Quality of students' learning outcomes
2. Supporting students' learning through learning experiences and teachers' practice
3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing students' learning

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.

Included in this curriculum evaluation report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

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.
2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.</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.
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 students/pupils.
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</td></tr>
</table>

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

Curriculum evaluation

Date of inspection	05/03/2026 and 06/03/2026
Inspection activities undertaken • Discussion with the principal, deputy principal and teachers • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview	• Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

School context

Scoil Bernadette is located in Montenotte on the north side of Cork city. Operating under the patronage of the Bishop of Cork and Ross, it is a co-educational special school for young people aged between twelve and eighteen with a mild intellectual disability. At the time of the evaluation 132 students were enrolled. The school offered a range of Junior Cycle subjects at Level 3, the Junior Cycle Schools' Programme (JCSP), the Junior Cycle Level Two Programme (JCL2LP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the Senior Cycle Level Two Programme (SCL2LP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

Seventeen class teachers, 109 post-primary subject teaching hours per week or 4.75 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) for the provision of post-primary subjects and twenty special needs assistants (SNAs) were allocated to the school, together with an administrative school principal and deputy principal.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of learning outcomes in language and communication for students was very good.
- Learning experiences were excellent and a very wide range of activities to support students to develop and generalise language and communication skills, within and outside classrooms, was provided.
- High quality teaching was observed: teachers' practice, in almost all lessons, was effective in ensuring that students were motivated to engage in their learning through being provided with a range of language-rich activities, experiences and interactions.
- Calm, secure and low-arousal learning environments were underpinned by very positive relationships between staff and students.
- The quality of school planning, including school self-evaluation (SSE) was very good.
- Individual student support plans were developed although greater whole-school consistency in assessment practices is required for a more targeted response to students' needs.

Recommendation

- Teachers should collaboratively develop a whole-school plan for teaching, learning and assessment: this should include a provision for the development of subject specific language and the effective use of assistive technology.
- The principal and deputy principal should collaborate with teachers to review and update the current assessment policy: this should include the implementation of a suite of formal and informal assessment approaches and a whole-school approach to data analysis to inform next steps in teaching and learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of students' learning outcomes

The quality of learning outcomes in language and communication for students was very good. Students experienced an abundance of opportunities to develop their expressive and receptive language through the provision of well-planned and prepared whole-school events, such as school assemblies and performances where students actively shared and articulated their learning. Students were able to make choices, express preferences, listen and attend. Through the provision of well-prepared tasks and wait-time students responded to and answered questions and engaged in learning with each other.

Students demonstrated motivation and enjoyment in their learning. They were able to engage with ideas presented to them by teachers, to take turns and to follow instructions and teacher explanations in lessons. Learning was regularly demonstrated through: articulating what they were learning; explaining their ideas; engagement with or completion of scaffolded tasks; and preparing and providing presentations on given topics to their peers, teachers and SNAs.

A total communication approach was evident throughout the school and students were very intentionally encouraged and supported by adults to initiate communication with others and to develop oral language skills. They were supported to read a variety of texts and to engage with written tasks.

Overall, teachers' assessment practices were effective. Evidence of learning was gathered in student portfolios of work for assessment purposes which included key assignments and tasks in LCA. Opportunities in lessons for role play and drama as well as performances in music and dance supported students' expression and language development. Building students' confidence and communication skills through social engagement was a key strength of the educational experience provided to the students.

2. Supporting students' learning outcomes through learning experiences and teachers' practice

Learning experiences were excellent and a very wide range of activities to support students to develop and generalise language and communication skills, within and outside classrooms, was provided. An active student council and student green school committee were examples of deliberate efforts to afford students opportunities to generalise their learning, build confidence and support the development of language and communication skills. Student involvement in whole-school committees provided opportunities for student voice and participation as well as collaboration on whole-school matters and engagement with peers and staff across the school. Students in the focus group meeting spoke very positively of the wide range of learning activities available in the school and of the very positive friendships and relationships they enjoyed with both their peers and staff.

High quality teaching was observed. Teachers' practice, in almost all lessons, was effective in ensuring that students were motivated to participate in their learning through a range of language-rich activities, experiences and social interactions. Teachers were well prepared for their lessons and provided purposeful opportunities for students to engage in their learning independently and in collaboration with their peers. Careful and intentional pairing of students to work with each other and to complement each other's' strengths and interests was a key feature of many lessons. In a very small number of lessons, teacher preparation should have been more focused on the individual students' needs and supporting their engagement and participation in learning. Individual student support plans were developed. Some of the plans examined during the evaluation by inspectors required further development, particularly in the identification of individual students' priority learning needs and attainment levels.

Classrooms were very well resourced, however, teachers should further develop classroom spaces to ensure that students have access to high-quality visuals and subject specific

vocabulary and key terms to support tier two and tier three language acquisition. Meaningful learning tasks for students at the early stages of reading and writing were provided and when assistive technology was used it supported students effectively. Agreed whole-school approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in language and communication across the various subjects, programmes and overall school curriculum should be discussed and developed collaboratively by staff, and this should include a plan for the effective use of assistive technology to support students' literacy development.

Calm, secure and low-arousal learning environments were underpinned by very positive relationships between staff and students. Teachers and SNAs knew their students well and this contributed significantly to the positive classroom atmospheres which supported students' engagement in learning and their overall wellbeing.

The quality of the school's indoor and outdoor environment was very good. Staff made effective use of the available accommodation and outside spaces to provide opportunities for meaningful movement and experiential learning.

3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing students' learning

The quality of school planning, including SSE, was very good. At the time of the evaluation, the school's focus for SSE was on the promotion of students' wellbeing. Teachers worked together to develop and provide a wide range of activities and social interactions to promote students' wellbeing and confidence, with a clear focus on learning and the development of their language and communication skills.

A school plan reflecting the vision and ethos of the school, which was to develop independence through the provision of a secure, caring and supportive environment and a broad curriculum, had been developed by school leadership and staff. It was commendable that student-centred decisions had been to the fore regarding the provision of an age-appropriate post-primary curriculum experience for students. The broad and varied curriculum offered was based on the individual strengths and needs of the students and provided all students with an opportunity to achieve certification and profiles of achievement at a variety of levels across junior and senior cycles. While effective practice was evident, there was scope to further strengthen planning by ensuring it is consistently informed by students' identified learning needs. The use of resources from the curriculum toolkits for the Primary Language Curriculum and Primary Mathematics Curriculum could assist teachers in establishing baseline attainment, aligning learning pathways, and planning structured, incremental improvement targets.

A significant range of assessment approaches were used across classrooms. Whole-school consistency in assessment practices is required for a more targeted response to students' needs. The principal and deputy principal should work with teachers to collaboratively review and update the current assessment policy with a focus on developing a suite of formal and informal assessment tools. The policy should also include an agreed whole-school approach to the systematic analysis of data to identify the next steps in pupils' learning and to inform approaches. The Curriculum Access Tool for Students with General Learning Disability (CAT-GLD), the *Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools* (2022), and resources included in the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) *Relate* should be consulted and used. The examples of student support files and plans together with guidance on the problem-solving process detailed in *The Guidelines for Schools-Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs* (2024) should also be engaged with to support the planning process.

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For the students of Scoil Bernadette Special School about their learning in Language and Communication
Date of inspection: 06/03/2026

Introduction

Your school had an inspection of Language and Communication recently. This page for students describes what the inspectors found and gives ideas about what the school should do to make learning better.

What did the inspectors do during the visit?

The inspectors visited classrooms and talked to teachers and students about the work they were doing. Inspectors also met with a focus group of students to talk to them about their learning.

What did the inspectors find?

Here are some of the main things:

- Student learning in language and communication was very good.
- Learning experiences were excellent and teaching was high quality.
- Teachers and SNAs knew their students well and classroom atmospheres were very good which helped students' learning and wellbeing.

What the inspectors said the school should do to make learning better

- Teachers should make a plan to help students learn new words for each subject and use devices like tablets or speech-to-text to help, when needed.
- Teachers should see how students are learning and use different ways to check learning and decide what to teach next.

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
A special thank you to pupils who took part in the focus group.

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

We welcome the findings of the recent report and accept its recommendations in full. We are delighted that the inspectors recognized our high-quality teaching, excellent learning experiences, and very good outcomes in language and communication. It is also rewarding to see our calm, secure learning environment and positive staff-student relationships commended. To build on these strengths, work has already begun to implement the recommendations. Our teaching team is collaboratively developing a comprehensive whole-school plan for teaching, learning, and assessment, with a specific focus on subject-specific language and assistive technology. Additionally, school leadership is collaborating with staff to update our assessment policy, introducing robust formal and informal approaches to data analysis. We appreciate the constructive insights to help us continue providing a targeted, high-quality education for all our students.

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

To build on the positive findings of our recent inspection, we have developed a structured, multi-year implementation strategy. Over the next few years, our focus will be on unifying our assessment practices and deepening our language-rich curriculum and technology.

Year 1: Collaborative Planning and Assessment Review:

Our collaboration immediate priority is to address the consistency of student tracking. The principal and deputy principal will lead a staff working group to review and update the current school assessment policy.

Assessment Suite: We will establish a standardised suite of both formal and informal assessment tools. This will ensure that every classroom uses identical frameworks to measure student progress.

Data Analysis: Staff will receive targeted professional development on whole-school data analysis. By the end of this year, dedicated time will be scheduled each term for teachers to analyse these results collectively, ensuring data directly informs the next steps in daily teaching.

Year 2: Designing the Whole-School Plan:

With robust assessment frameworks in place, Year 2 will focus on creating a unified, collaborative whole-school plan for teaching and learning.

Subject-Specific Language: Subject departments and class teachers will collaborate to map out key vocabulary across all curriculum areas. We will design explicit frameworks to teach this language, ensuring students can confidently transition and generalise their communication skills between different subjects.

Targeted Support Plans: We will integrate our new assessment data directly into individual student support plans, ensuring a highly consistent, whole-school approach to meeting specific student needs.

Year 3: Embedding Assistive Technology and Evaluation

The final phase will focus on empowering students through existing and new digital tools and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Assistive Technology: We will audit our current digital tools and invest in targeted assistive technologies that support language and communication. Training will be provided to staff and students, and as an optional choice to parents, to seamlessly embed these technologies into both classroom activities and independent learning.

School Self-Evaluation (SSE): We will utilise our established SSE processes to monitor the impact of these changes. Regular reviews, including student and parent feedback, will ensure these new practices remain effective and responsive.

Through this phased roadmap, we are confident that our school will not only maintain its excellent learning environment but also deliver an even more tailored, equitable educational experience for every student.