



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St. Francis Special School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Borris Road Portlaoise Co Laois
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	19337Q
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	08-06-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	11/10/2023

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

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.

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>Anti-bullying</i>
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.	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 Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.	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. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.	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 learners.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the <i>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017</i> .	4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the <i>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017</i> .	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.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the	

<p>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE).</li><li>8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.</li></ol>	
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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>Date of inspection</b>	08-06-2023
<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>• Meeting with teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Learner focus group</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 learners' work</li><li>• Interaction with learners</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers and to board of management representatives</li></ul>

## School context

St Francis Special School provides education to children and young people with mild or moderate general learning disabilities, some of whom have co-occurring autism, sensory or medical needs. The school is under the patronage of the Bishop of the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin. The school serves children and young people from Laois and surrounding counties. Current enrolment is 110 children and young people ranging in age from five to nineteen years.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The quality of children and young people's learning was good; in almost all lessons children and young people engaged in meaningful learning activities.
- Teaching was of a high quality. Exemplary teaching was observed in a small number of lessons.
- Overall, very high quality relationships between staff and children and young people underpinned positive learning experiences.
- The quality of support for learners' wellbeing was generally very good.
- Leadership and management was of a very high standard.
- The quality of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) was good.

### Recommendations

- To build on the good practices in place, a whole-school approach to communication and language should be developed to ensure that each learner develops functional communication skills in line with their ability.
- In order to share the effective teaching practices in place and to continue to develop the learner experiences and outcomes, school leaders should support teachers to collaboratively share expertise and pedagogical practices that have proven successful.
- The priority learning needs identified by teachers should be used to inform suitably specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound targets for learning.
- To strengthen approaches to positive management of behaviour, the school should review existing practices, beginning with an appraisal of the school's Code of Behaviour.

## 1. The quality of learning

- The quality of children and young people's learning was good.
- In almost all lessons, the children and young people were well supported to engage in purposeful learning activities. In most instances, suitably high expectations were set for learning and there was evidence that children and young people were progressing in their learning. Learners could demonstrate and apply their skills and knowledge at a level commensurate with their ability in most lessons.
- Children and young people participated in a range of communication and language activities and listening skills were well-developed. In most instances, they responded well to the wide range of strategies used by teachers to communicate expectations and concepts. Opportunities to support learners to communicate themselves were less well developed. Collectively, a whole-school approach to communication and language development that ensures that each learner develops functional communication skills in line with their ability should be developed.
- The children and young people were provided with good opportunities to participate in lessons. Very high quality engagement was observed in a significant minority of lessons where learners were facilitated to work collaboratively in a manner that promoted creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking. There is potential to identify and share highly effective methodologies that support the active participation of all learners.
- Very high quality relationships between staff and children and young people underpinned positive learning experiences in almost all lessons. Very good teacher circulation during individual and collaborative tasks supported the learners to achieve good outcomes, while also enabling teachers to assess the learning. Generally, staff worked seamlessly alongside each other in classrooms providing very good support, while maintaining a low arousal environment that contributed to productive learning, good regulation and positive behaviour.

## 2. The quality of teaching

- Teaching was of a high quality.
- There was evidence of good use of visual and concrete supports for learning. A variety of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) supports were in use including LÁMH, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Core Boards, and digital applications. It was evident in almost all instances that significant work had taken place to prepare and develop materials to support learning, communication and behaviour. There was scope to refine the use of these approaches to ensure skilful application and consistency in their use.
- Exemplary teaching was observed in a small number of lessons. Where observed, teachers had a very clear understanding of the Curriculum and of Level One and Two Learning Programmes (L1LPs and L2LPs) at Junior Cycle. They incorporated well-considered active learning methodologies into their teaching. In order to share the effective teaching practices in place and to continue to develop the learner experiences and outcomes, school leaders should support teachers to collaboratively share expertise and pedagogical practices that have proven successful.
- A broad range of assessment data, including teacher observations was gathered by almost all teachers. Teachers knew the learners well and appropriate differentiation was evident in almost all lessons. Highly effective differentiation was observed in a minority of lessons where teachers tailored strategies to meet individual learning needs in a highly skilful manner. While priority learning needs were identified, they did not always inform suitably specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound targets. This is an area for development and should be addressed.
- Significant work has taken place recently in the area of literacy. Following research and consultation, the school have identified and purchased graded readers to support reading development at the school. This commendable process should be extended by

developing a literacy policy and plan that outlines the agreed approaches and resources to be used to support learners from the earliest stages of literacy development through to those who can achieve competency in reading.

### **3. The quality of support for learners' wellbeing**

- The quality of support for learners' wellbeing was very good.
- St. Francis Special School has a proud tradition of providing very good care to learners. The board of management and the senior management team foster a commitment to the holistic development of each child and young person. The impact of this commitment is far-reaching and evident across the approaches adopted by the school.
- There was a palpable sense of community at the school and this was noted by staff and parents alike. The learners themselves, in discussion with the inspection team, spoke about the quality of relationships with staff and of the valuable friendships that had been forged. This sense of community extended beyond the classroom and excellent links had been developed with the local community. These connections are very effectively used to provide enriching activities that serve to support the development of important skills for life, particularly for Learners in the senior classes.
- When surveyed online, as part of the evaluation, all responding parents agreed that they felt welcome in the school and that their child felt safe and well looked after in the school. Almost all parents agreed that their child was treated fairly and respectfully and that their child enjoys school.
- Very good links have been forged with relevant agencies including the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), local disability services, the local medical teams, training providers and post-school services.
- School leaders together with the wider team are working towards greater promotion and facilitation of learners' voice, participation and leadership. Learners have been surveyed on aspects of school life and it is timely that a Student Council has been recently established. This work should be continued to enable children and young people to meaningfully contribute to the development of the school.

### **4. The quality of leadership and management**

- The quality of leadership and management was very good. The leadership vision is one of a vibrant, positive school community focussed on the holistic development of every child and young person. The board and school management, supported by the staff, have ably overseen significant expansion and redevelopment of the school in recent years. The school building, the environs and resources, including the digital infrastructure were of a very high standard and were carefully maintained, creating a very positive learning and working environment.
- The principal demonstrates a fair, transparent and enabling leadership approach. He seeks to promote respectful connections across the school community and to inspire leadership capacity within the whole staff team and also in the parents and learners.
- Curriculum planning for teaching was good. Some very good work had taken place in leading teaching and learning. There was evidence of broad and balanced curricular provision. School leadership have been highly supportive of staff continuing professional development (CPD) needs.
- Positive behaviour management had been identified as an area for development. A whole-school review of behaviour management, beginning with an appraisal of the school's Code of Behaviour should be undertaken. The review should aim to develop understanding of the nature and function of behaviour and how learners' needs, and particularly communication needs, can impact on behaviour.
- The Droichead process is in place to support the professional learning of newly qualified teachers.

## 5. The quality of school self-evaluation

- The quality of SSE was good. Wellbeing was the key area of focus. Very good work has begun in relation to Wellbeing and a Student Council has been developed to enhance the leadership role of learners. The views of parents, staff and some learners had been sought through questionnaires and focus group meetings, the outcomes of which informed the action plan for development. On foot of this work, the SSE team selected the area of Relationships and Partnerships as the school's key focus. This work has very good potential to support positive relationships across the school community, as the school evolves.

## 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 learners' 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 learners' 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;