



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Scoil Thomais
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Laurel Lodge Castleknock Dublin 15
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	19769W
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	07-12-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	06/03/2024

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 inspector(s) 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

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.

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. 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	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.

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

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Dates of inspection	05-12-2023 - 07-12-2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Meetings with principal and members of the in-school leadership team • Meeting with representatives of the board of management • Meeting with parent representatives • Meeting 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, teachers and a board of management representative

School context

Scoil Thomáis is a large, urban, co-educational primary school in Castleknock, Dublin 15. It operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. At the time of the evaluation the school had an administrative principal and deputy principal, twenty-seven mainstream class teachers, a special class teacher, and twelve special education teachers (SETs). There were 651 pupils enrolled in the school.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of pupils' learning was very good.
- Teachers' practice was highly effective.
- Support for pupils' wellbeing was of a very high quality.
- The quality of leadership and management was very good.
- School leaders and teachers have engaged in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process very successfully to promote school improvement.
- School staff worked collaboratively to foster a positive school culture that encouraged respectful interactions at all levels within the school community.

Recommendations

- Moltar do cheannairí scoile agus do mhúinteoirí a chinnítú go bhfuil níos mó deiseanna á thabhairt do dhaltáí an foclóir nua agus an Ghaeilge atá acu a chleachtadh agus a úsáid i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla le béim ar leith ar chumarsáid. *It is recommended that school leaders and teachers ensure that pupils are provided with additional opportunities to use new vocabulary and practise their Irish in different contexts, with particular emphasis on communication.*
- School leaders and teachers should further develop whole-school approaches to assessment to monitor pupils' progress in learning across the curriculum.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning

- The quality of pupils' learning was very good. Pupils experienced an integrated learning programme and demonstrated very high levels of engagement. Pupils were good communicators and were afforded opportunities in almost all lessons to talk about and reflect on their learning. *Aistear, the early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and play based pedagogy was implemented very successfully in junior classes. In the inspectorate questionnaires, almost all pupils stated that they enjoyed their lessons and learning and that the school helped them to do well in all their subjects.
- The quality of pupils' literacy and oral language skills was very good. Their knowledge of the reading process was well developed. Teachers created worthwhile opportunities for emergent writers to explore writing in a purposeful manner. Pupils showed very good understanding of writing genres. In senior classes, they drafted and edited their work. Pupils were encouraged to read a range of books. Pupils who participated in the focus group discussion spoke very positively about their leadership roles and visits to the school library. There was evidence of the incremental development of handwriting skills. However, there was inconsistency in the transfer of these skills to copy work. Teachers should ensure that pupils' written work is of a high quality and monitored consistently across all areas of the curriculum, appropriate to their level of development.
- Bhí cáilíocht foghlama na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge go maith. Léirigh an chuid is mó de na daltaí cumas maith i dtuiscint na Gaeilge. 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 ach ní raibh go leor deiseanna ag na daltaí an Ghaeilge a úsáid go rialta, áfach. Ba chóir níos mó deiseanna a thabhairt do dhaltaí gach lá, an foclóir nua agus an Ghaeilge atá acu a chleachtadh agus a úsáid i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla le béim ar leith ar chumarsáid. Moltar do cheannairí scoile agus do mhúinteoirí a chinnitú go bhfuil nasc níos laidre idir na trí shnáithe churaclaim; teanga ó bhéal, léitheoireacht agus scríbhneoireacht chun scileanna teanga gach dalta a fhorbairt tuilleadh. *The quality of learning in Irish was good. Most pupils demonstrated good understanding of Irish. They had a broad range of vocabulary and they performed a range of poetry and song with enthusiasm. Vocabulary was taught accurately, although pupils hadn't enough opportunities to use Irish regularly. More opportunities should be provided for pupils to use new vocabulary and practise their Irish daily in different contexts, with particular emphasis on communication. It is recommended that school leaders and teachers ensure that there is a stronger link between the three strands of the curriculum: oral language, reading and writing to further develop the language skills of all pupils.*
- The quality of pupils' learning in Mathematics was commendable. Teachers worked collaboratively in the delivery of the mathematics curriculum using an effective range of methodologies. Pupils recalled facts, explained concepts and used mathematical strategies and language purposefully as they talked about their learning. Where learner experiences and outcomes were most successful, there was a skill-based and active learning focus. These pupils worked with a variety of manipulatives and learning was enhanced by opportunities to relate Mathematics to their everyday lives.
- During the evaluation, pupils were appropriately challenged in their learning. Displays of pupils' project work and creative artwork were of a high standard. Pupils successfully integrated and connected many different aspects of their learning in literacy, mathematics, the arts and social environmental and scientific education. Pupils enjoyed daily opportunities to be physically active.

2. The quality of teaching

- The quality of teaching was very good. Teachers had a very clear understanding of the curriculum and a good knowledge of pedagogy. They communicated high expectations for learning and incorporated active learning methodologies, including digital technologies into their teaching. Teachers used a wide range of approaches and in most lessons used appropriate resources skilfully to engage the learners, enrich teaching and support pupils in their learning. School leaders had systems in place to ensure that skilled teachers shared expertise and pedagogical practices that have proven successful at improving learning outcomes and enriching learner experiences.
- The quality of supports for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) was very good. The staged approach to provision for pupils with SEN using the continuum of support was well established. Pupils' priority learning needs were identified and relevant targets to support pupils in their learning were evident. The school recently opened a class for pupils with autism. Currently SEN resources are used to support pupils in this class. The school is currently engaging with external agencies. School leaders are advised to devise an action plan to ensure that this class is resourced in accordance with the guidelines issued by the National Council for Special Education.
- The quality of assessment was good. Teachers had a range of assessment data available during the evaluation. These included work samples, checklists, pupils' thoughts on school, parent questionnaires and teacher-designed tasks mainly in English and Mathematics. Where best practice was observed, teachers provided pupils with feedback to progress their learning. However, there was scope for teachers to develop assessment practices further. Teachers should ensure that assessment data informs the next steps in teaching and learning and tracks pupils' progress in learning across all the curricular areas. SET's should ensure that progression of learning is clearly documented in student support files.

3. The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing

- The quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was very good. Pupils were exemplary in their behaviour. The development of positive and caring relationships contributed positively to pupils' wellbeing. Teachers have developed and maintained strong links with parents, the local community and external agencies to support pupils' social, emotional and academic needs. Teachers and leaders implemented a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance pupils' wellbeing.
- School leaders promoted and facilitated the development of pupil voice and leadership through the Students' Council. Pupils, teachers and members of the wider school community were represented on the well-being committee. Pupils' were involved in relevant decision-making processes. Almost all pupils who completed the pupil survey indicated that they felt safe and cared for in school.

4. The quality of leadership and management

- The quality of school leadership and management was very good. The board of management had a clear understanding of its role. They were well informed regarding school developments and achievements in teaching and learning. A broad range of administrative policies was available to support the management of the school.
- School leaders shared a range of curricular, pastoral and administrative duties. The principal had excellent organisational and management skills. She fostered a strong culture of collaboration and empowered staff to take on leadership roles. She was ably supported by the deputy principal and assistant principals. They communicated a shared vision centred on the holistic development of pupils. They provided curricular guidance to teachers and ensured the provision of appropriate resources to support teaching and learning across the curriculum. The very effective leadership in the school was evident in the culture of improvement and in teachers' openness to exploring and reviewing teaching approaches and methodologies.
- The parents' association provided valuable support to the school. In the inspectorate questionnaires, most parents stated that the school was well run and that there was a good atmosphere in the school. Almost all parents agreed that their child felt safe and well looked after in school and agreed that their child was doing well in the school.
- Procedures to support the mentoring and induction of teachers were well established. The school reported that it regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement is welcomed and included among the *Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*.

5. The quality of school self-evaluation

- The quality of SSE was very good. 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. This informed target setting and effective action planning with a current focus on well-being and digital learning.
- At the time of the evaluation those leading the SSE process had focused on the teaching of Irish. Teachers shared and modelled good practice. They evaluated and commendably, developed resources to support the teaching of Irish. Future work in this area should focus on improving pupils' ability to communicate with confidence in Irish. Work on SSE has impacted positively on teachers practice and 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	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

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Scoil Thomais welcomes this affirming report.

We are very pleased that staff collaboration is recognised as fostering a positive school culture which encourages respectful interactions at all levels of the school community. We are delighted that pupils' behaviour is noted as being exemplary.

The Board notes many positives throughout the report:

- The school meets all the requirements for Child Protection and Anti-Bullying procedures.
- The pupils experience an integrated learning programme and display high levels of engagement in lessons. Displays of pupils' work are of a high standard. In particular, the quality of learning in Maths is commendable. Areas of literacy, including reading, writing and oral language, are also identified as well developed in the school.
- High expectations, a wide range of resources, digital technologies and the use of appropriate resources are recognised as strengths of teachers' practice.
- The quality of support for pupils with SEN is very good.
- The positive and caring relationships that exist in the school contribute to the very good quality of support for pupils' wellbeing.
- A shared vision, centred on the holistic development of pupils, exists amongst the leadership and management team. The very effective leadership is evident in the culture of improvement that exists in the school.
- School leaders, work closely with staff members, to skilfully and effectively implement very good practices in School Self-Evaluation (SSE).
- The Board of Management has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities.
- The Parents' Association provides valuable support to the school.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

- The school welcomes the acknowledgement of work done on SSE in Gaeilge and the fact that it has impacted positively on teachers practice and learner outcomes and experiences. With this in mind, we will focus on providing additional opportunities for pupils to use new vocabulary and practise their Irish in different contexts.
- We will prioritise the development of whole school approaches to assessment to monitor pupils learning across the curriculum.