



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

## REPORT

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| Ainm na scoile/School name                            | Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Finnín                 |
| Seoladh na scoile/School address                      | Glenties Park<br>Rivermount<br>Finglas South |
| Uimhir rolla/Roll number                              | 19489Q                                       |
| Dáta na cigireachta/<br>Date of evaluation            | 21-09-2023                                   |
| Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/<br>Date of issue of report | 19/12/2023                                   |

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# 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

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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## 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:   |  |
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| <i>Child Protection</i>   | <i>Anti-bullying</i>   |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement were prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.</li><li>2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and included an annual review and a risk assessment.</li><li>3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</li><li>4. The Child Safeguarding Statement met the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).</li><li>5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that met the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools (revised 2023).</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The school had developed an anti-bullying policy that met the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.</li><li>2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provided 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.</li><li>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.</li><li>4. The school had appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.</li><li>5. All teachers visited reported that they have read the school's policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their</li></ol> |

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>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).</li><li>7. School planning documentation indicated that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE).</li><li>8. Child protection records were maintained in a secure location.</li></ol> | roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying. |
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

# Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

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| <b>Date of inspection</b>  | 21-09-2023  |
| <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>• Pupil focus group</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of pupils' work</li><li>• Interaction with pupils</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives</li></ul> |

## School context

Saint Finian's National School is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and serves the catchment area of South Finglas. In addition to classes from junior infants to sixth class, the school is also part of the Early Start programme of the Department of Education. Total pupil enrolment at the time of the evaluation was 258. School staffing included the administrative principal, thirteen mainstream class teachers, six full-time support teachers, one part-time support teacher and 9.66 special needs assistants. St Finian's NS participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- Pupils' learning was good. Pupils demonstrated a particularly good understanding of topics taught in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
- Observed teaching was of a very high standard.
- Support for pupils' wellbeing was excellent.
- The quality of leadership and management was very good.
- Provision for school self-evaluation was very good.

### Recommendations

- Teachers should place a greater emphasis on communicating learning expectations to pupils including individualised oral feedback during lessons to make the learning explicit, connect it to previous learning, and set expectations for future learning.
- Is gá do mhúinteoirí níos mó Gaeilge a úsáid i ngnáthshaol na scoile chun comhthéacs a chruthú don Ghaeilge mar theanga bheo. (*Teachers should use more Irish in the daily life of the school to help create a context for Irish as a living language.*)

## Detailed findings and recommendations

### 1. The quality of pupils' learning

- The quality of pupils' learning was observed to be good.
- Pupils demonstrated a good understanding of concepts taught particularly in SESE and SPHE. In most lessons observed, pupils engaged with enthusiasm, were motivated to learn and expected to achieve. Pupils' learning was particularly enhanced when pupils' curiosity was stimulated and they could see the connection between their previous and new learning; this was particularly evident in lessons in Mathematics and Irish. In a survey completed by pupils as part of this evaluation, almost all pupils agreed that the school is helping them to become a good reader and do well in Mathematics.
- In most lessons, pupils demonstrated a very good capacity to work effectively with other pupils. In a focus group interview during the evaluation, pupils spoke with enthusiasm about their learning experiences and with an insightful understanding and appreciation of how their teachers supported them with their learning.
- Although it was early in the school year, there were good records of independent and task-based learning in literacy and the Arts displayed around the school and in copybooks. It was noteworthy that pupils in the infant classrooms spoke and interacted using full sentences. The language experience approach in the Early Start class was very strong. The school should consider tracking pupils who transfer from the Early Start class to junior infants to monitor language use.
- Co-curricular provision such as the school orchestra provided very meaningful and engaging opportunities for pupils to work together and perform publicly.

## 2. The quality of teaching

- The quality of teaching was very good.
- Teachers demonstrated a very good capacity to skilfully use a range of teaching and assessment approaches and methodologies to cultivate learning. In a survey, almost all pupils agreed that teachers taught them in ways that helped them learn.
- All classrooms and learning settings presented as organised and affirming learning environments for pupils. A number of highly effective classroom displays were observed. These included pictures of pupils engaging in and explaining place value activities or classroom routines. All teachers should increase the use of focused displays to support current and new learning and consolidate previous learning.
- All observed lessons had clear learning objectives, were appropriately structured and paced and provided for the assessment of learning. There were some very good observed examples of teachers connecting new learning to previous learning and making learning and progress explicit to pupils; there was potential for all teachers to ensure that this emphasis characterises all lessons to include encouraging pupils to set personal targets for learning.
- *Sa Ghaeilge, díródh an teagasc ar leibhéal foghlama reatha na ndaltaí, agus ar fhorbairt a muiníne in úsáid na teanga ó bhéal. D'ainneoin an fócas ceart seo, is gá feabhas a chur ar úsáid na teanga i measc na ndaltaí. Bhí an fhéidearthacht ann do mhúinteoirí cur le húsáid na Gaeilge mar chuid de ghnáth-theanga laethúil an ranga; chabhródh sé seo le comhthéacs beo a chruthú don Ghaeilge agus chuirfeadh sé le braistint cuspóra a chur ar fáil don teagasc agus don fhoghlaim sa Ghaeilge.* [The teaching in Irish was focused on pupils' current level of learning and on developing their confidence using the language orally. Notwithstanding this correct focus, improvement in pupils' use of the language is necessary. There was potential for teachers to enhance the use of Irish as part of the daily language of the classroom; this will help create a living context for the Irish language and provide a sense of purpose for teaching and learning in Irish.]
- The quality of assessment was good. Constructive feedback was provided to pupils in copybooks and pupils were engaging well with this feedback. There was potential to enhance the feedback dimension within station-teaching, particularly in terms of individual target-setting.
- It was highly commendable that teachers reviewed and adapted their literacy station teaching interventions from last year. This has resulted in a renewed focus on a researched programme for phonics and phonological awareness facilitated by the special education team. Also arising from this review was a further emphasis on developing independent reading fluency activities through the use of laptops, developing comprehension skills through guided reading and developing independent writing skills to inform spelling instruction.
- Care was taken to accurately identify the learning needs of pupils with special and additional educational needs and focused plans were in place to meet these needs in accordance with the Continuum of Support framework. Clear structures were in place for co-ordinating the provision of this support between mainstream class teachers and the special education team. Support lessons were observed to be engaging and affirming learning experiences for pupils.

- Almost all parents who completed a survey agreed that teaching was good in the school and that their child was doing well.

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

- The quality of pupils' provision for wellbeing was excellent.
- School management and teachers shared a collective and research-based understanding and approach to cultivating pupils' wellbeing. This was a hallmark of provision for teaching and learning and this commitment to wellbeing infused the dynamics and relationships in all observed classrooms and learning settings.
- It was praiseworthy that morning meditation was facilitated by pupils over the intercom each morning. Pupils reported how much they enjoyed this practice and how they used these breathing techniques whenever they felt worried or stressed both inside and outside of the school. This was also reported by parents.
- Teachers were skilled in the implementation of strategies and programmes to support the holistic development of pupils. More intensive specific interventions to support wellbeing for small group and individuals was provided very effectively through a Nurture Programme.
- During focus group discussion, pupils supported the survey responses where almost all pupils reported that they felt safe and cared for in this school.
- Almost all parents who completed a survey agreed that their children felt safe and well looked after in the school and treated respectfully and fairly in school and that their children enjoyed school.

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

- The quality of school leadership and management was observed to be very good.
- School management had a clearly-defined vision for pupils' learning and a strong commitment to its realisation. It was evident that this vision permeated school life and teaching and learning and was significant in setting high expectations for learning and influencing decision-making for school improvement.
- Teachers worked collectively as part of the in-school management team (ISM) and the special education team (SEN) with a shared sense of purpose and commitment to shared goals. The work of the school principal was particularly significant in cultivating coherence between management groups and between all stakeholders supporting them to be solution focused and autonomous.
- In teacher survey results, while a significant majority of teachers agreed that they were involved in the decision-making processes and that good channels of communication were in place, a small number of teachers who completed a survey disagreed with this statement. All teachers agreed that the school was welcoming of parents. Almost all parents who completed the survey agreed that the school was well run and that they knew who to speak to if they had a concern.
- A particularly strong dimension to the principal's leadership was a knowledge of all available support services, the proactive engagement with these services and a determination in ensuring pupil access to these services.

## 5. The quality of school self-evaluation

- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) was very good.
- The school's approach to the SSE process was grounded in the school's vision, an astute and shared understanding of the school context, and a commitment to teaching and learning for all pupils.
- School management and teachers used and analysed a range of appropriate assessment data to decide upon very considered actions. There was evidence that the current DEIS plan targets were being met and that the school had made improvements in literacy, numeracy and attendance in recent years for certain cohorts of pupils.
- It was praiseworthy that school management and teachers were beginning to move away from target-setting exclusively based on standardised test results to more broadly-based assessment information, which had been analysed very well for literacy and numeracy. This more broadly-based approach to assessment should be progressed further.



## 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;   |