



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Portumna Community School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	St Brigid's Road, Portumna, Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	914130
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	15-11-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	20/02/2024

---

# 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 inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

## 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>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.</li> <li>2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes 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 meets 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 meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools (revised 2023).</li> <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 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>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</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 has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.</li> <li>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.</li> </ol>

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

---

# Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Dates of inspection	13, 14 and 15 November 2023
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with Board of Management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul>

## School context

Portumna Community School is a co-educational post-primary school established in 1990. It is under the trusteeship of the Diocese of Clonfert and the Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board. The school has been successful in being approved for the provision of additional accommodation. Enrolment is inclusive and numbers have shown steady growth in the last few years. At the time of the evaluation it stood at 476 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- There was a very high standard of student support and care provided to students; the very broad curriculum and very respectful student-teacher rapport all led to a very positive atmosphere in the school.
- The board of management functioned actively and effectively and, with the backing of the trustees, provided very good support to the school.
- The standard of teaching was good overall; this ranged from very good and good practice in most lessons to satisfactory practice in a small number of lessons.
- The quality of learning was good, with scope to develop formative feedback and assessment practices further.
- The quality of leadership and management was very good overall.
- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process was in line with the latest circular and there was evidence of teachers implementing agreed strategies during many of the lessons observed.
- Excellent student behaviour, the safe and caring environment, the multiple opportunities for students to be involved in leadership roles and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities all led to a very good approach by the school to supporting student wellbeing.

### Recommendations

- Effective use of written formative feedback, a greater variety of assessment practices and consistent use of learning intentions in lessons were areas for further development in teaching and learning.
- The digital technology used in lessons was largely of a presentation nature. The school should continue to expand its use of technology to support active learning and to reduce the practice of note-taking.
- While some subject department planning practices were good, this is an area in need of significant development for subject departments and oversight from senior management.

# Detailed findings and recommendations

## 1. The quality of teaching and learning

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

The quality of learning observed in lessons was good overall. The behaviour of students throughout the evaluation was exemplary and student-teacher interactions in lessons were very positive. The classrooms generally had a variety of purposeful layouts for the promotion of collaborative learning. The vast majority of rooms had subject-specific material on walls and students' work was often displayed as exemplars of good practice. These materials were, at times, referred to in lessons as a learning or revision aid.

Student engagement in learning was generally good or very good. Students were motivated and set high expectations for themselves in most lessons. A good variety of active learning methodologies was observed in most lessons, and the good practices of skill development, critical thinking and problem solving were observed regularly throughout the evaluation. In a small number of instances, the lessons were largely teacher-centred and in other cases note-taking occurred for extended periods. While digital technology was used in a large percentage of lessons, in most cases it was used for the presentation of information. The school should aim to expand the use of digital technology to support active learning practices further and to reduce the time spent in lessons on the practice of note-taking.

Teachers were able to support students during periods of active learning. Effective differentiation practices were evident in most lessons, though in some instances there was a need for the incorporation of extension activities to further challenge and cater for the more able students. Students with special educational needs (SEN) were included in mainstream lessons and were supported in tasks and activities.

Checking on prior learning at the start of lessons was a regular practice observed throughout the evaluation. Learning intentions were shared with the students or were obvious in most lessons; however this practice was only effective in a minority of lessons. Teachers should familiarise themselves with best practice in this regard as, in many instances, what was shared was the activities that were to occur in lessons rather than the intended learning for students. Teachers should check periodically during lessons to see if the intended learning is taking place and ensure that time is spent towards the end of the lessons recapitulating the main learning points. All students should be encouraged to use learning intentions as a study aid to reflect and take ownership of their learning.

### **Teachers' individual and collective practice**

The standard of teaching was good or very good in most lessons. Satisfactory practices were observed in a small number of lessons. There was a good balance between the time spent on teacher instruction and student activity and there were some very good examples of student-centred approaches. Active methodologies were used in most lessons and were effective and varied.

The preparation for lessons was good overall and teachers demonstrated competence and proficiency in the skills and knowledge of their subject areas. Classroom management skills were very good and teachers often affirmed students for their efforts in lessons. The pace and timing of lessons were areas for improvement in some cases. This should be addressed through careful planning and facilitation of activities to ensure that sufficient time is available at the end of lessons to recapitulate on learning.

Questioning was the main form of assessment in lessons and it was of a high standard overall. Oral questioning was best when it was distributed, inclusive and differentiated and where adequate time was provided for students to formulate a response. Other good formative assessment strategies were observed in some lessons such as the use of Show-Me boards and exit tickets. These, and other assessment for learning techniques, should be shared more widely across subject departments to support all teachers in broadening their classroom assessment practices.

Homework was set regularly by teachers and students were comfortable and supported to ask questions when they needed further clarity in relation to topics. Homework was checked for completion by teachers in most cases and the more challenging or difficult aspects of the homework were typically addressed at whole-class level. In a small number of lessons, where the whole-class corrections took a considerable amount of time, peer and self-assessment could have been considered as an alternative approach. In recent years, the teachers had moved to having three whole-school assessment events per year. A mixture of summative assessments and classroom-based assessments (CBAs) occurred during these periods, which was good practice.

Teachers provided students with formative feedback in many instances. This was typically in the form of oral feedback, but there was some evidence that good-quality written feedback was provided periodically. As a next step, subject departments should incorporate success criteria into their practices and decide what aspects of students' work would be most suitable for providing written formative feedback so that students can take further ownership of their learning and develop improvement plans.

The quality of teachers' collaborative practice was good overall. Teachers reported very good levels of sharing of practice and collegiality. Teachers were encouraged and volunteered to join various committees that supported the successful running of the school. Team teaching was an area that the school had begun to engage in recently and very good planning was evident in this regard.

Subject department co-ordinators had been appointed, though the agreed duties of this role should be documented. Detailed information was available in relation to professional learning undertaken and the structures of the departments. Inconsistencies were noted in the quality of subject department planning. For example, there was a need for a more consistent approach to developing units of learning and schemes of work across departments. Where not already the case, schemes should ensure that learning outcomes are linked to specific methodologies and a variety of assessment modes. All schemes should provide detail in relation to timeframes and a teacher-review section to support collaborative reflection and more efficient planning. These practices would enable schemes to be used as working documents and would facilitate greater sharing of pedagogy and practices.

Subject departments should expand upon their analysis of state examination results beyond comparisons against national averages. In addition to the data gathered by the school's assessment software programme, the context of the year group should be taken into account and strategies and targets should be devised for year-on-year improvement. Where not already the case, minutes of meetings should record progress in relation to any agreed strategies or targets set by subject departments and the whole-school SSE process.

## **2. Quality of school leadership and management**

The quality of school leadership and management was very good overall.

### **Leading learning and teaching**

The leadership of learning and teaching was good. The principal and deputy principal were both appointed four years previously. The school had been leading teaching and learning through the formation of a number of strategic committees, especially in the areas of SSE and SEN. Previous inspections had recommended that improvements should be made in areas such as active learning, written formative feedback and the effective use of learning intentions. Very good progress was evident in relation to active learning and some evidence of progress was evident in the other two areas. The SSE process was used effectively to support these improvements and this work should continue so that these practices, and others, are further embedded in lessons.

The school offered a very broad curriculum. First-year students enjoyed a sampling programme of subjects for four weeks at the start of the year and TY students experienced a similar programme on a ten-week modular basis. Timetabling was good overall, though there were some timetabling issues which senior management should address: some LCA modules require additional timetabled hours, the Junior Cycle wellbeing hours need to be increased slightly and some Junior Cycle subjects would benefit from a more equitable distribution of timetabled hours over the three years.

The organisation and structures for SEN were very good. The SEN hours were appropriately deployed and individualised student support files, which outline strengths and areas of need, were created and available. Students and parents were met by the SEN team so that targets could be shared and set. A lead teacher was assigned for each year group and a team of link teachers and support teachers was created to enhance the communication within the SEN department. The school should create a formal reporting system for mainstream teachers to provide feedback on the effectiveness of in-class strategies and supports to the SEN department throughout the year in a consistent manner.

The school had a special class for students with autism, named An Cuan, to provide support for up to six students. The students had a variety of needs and the teachers involved were focussed on integrating them into mainstream lessons as often as possible, with good outcomes reported to date. English as an Additional Language (EAL) supports were being provided to six Ukrainian students at the time of the evaluation and the success of their work was evident on various noticeboards throughout the school.

Team teaching was recently introduced in the school to further support the learning of all students. The lessons where team teaching was observed were good and the teachers had worked diligently to ensure that shared practices were effective. Peer observation was another teaching and learning initiative that had begun in the school. This was a very positive development and will be a very useful endeavour for teachers to share and upskill in practices that are currently working very effectively in the school.

The subject department schemes of work should be reviewed annually by senior or middle management to ensure that they are effective working documents. The board was looking to further support the school management in leading teaching and learning and the senior management could share the oversight of the schemes with the board, as part of the principal's report.

### **Managing the organisation**

The management of the organisation was very good. The board of management had been very attentive to the management and oversight of staff recruitment and the ongoing maintenance of facilities. Statutory policies, such as the child safeguarding statement, health and safety policy, and anti-bullying policy, were in place. The board was informed and took oversight of the SSE processes underway in the school. Detailed minutes of board meetings were maintained and agreed reports were available for staff and parents. The board should review the length of the school year, ensuring that all students are provided with the required 166 days of tuition time, as this is not currently the case for all year groups.

The staff and senior management oversaw the very effective day-to-day running of the school. In surveys and meetings conducted during the evaluation, parents, students and teachers indicated that the school was very well run and that the senior management team had an open and consultative management style. During the evaluation, a calm and orderly atmosphere prevailed and, despite the spread-out nature of the campus, students were routinely on time for lessons. The code of behaviour, through the actions of teachers and year heads, ensured that there was a very good ladder of referral for behavioural issues. Feedback from students indicated that they were familiar with the ladder of referral and felt it was very fair.

A post review, undertaken by staff, had resulted in a post structure that they felt provided very good support to the school. The committee and sub-committee structures that were in place provided very good distributed leadership structures and staff reported that channels of communication within the school were good. Teachers reported that collaboration among the staff was very good, that there was effective sharing of online resources and that new teachers were well supported in the school. The school had managed the changes that had taken place in the school in the previous few years very effectively.

### **Leading school development**

The quality of leading school development was very good. Strong links had been established between the school and the wider community through the sharing of facilities, involvement in community activities and school fairs and the provision of work experience opportunities for students. A parents' association had been recently re-established to help support the school in meeting its development priorities. The school had carefully considered the requirements of the



new cycle of SSE and had set targets for the following few years across multiple strands such as teaching and learning, wellbeing and digital learning.

The board and senior management had been very successful in the previous few years in securing grants and funding from the Department to upgrade the existing facilities through summer work and emergency work schemes. The plans for the development of new premises and expansions for the school site were well underway and this process will be a main priority for the board and staff in the coming years.

Student, parent and teacher responses to inspectorate surveys were very positive. In some instances the responses received were not conclusive. The school should explore these areas through the use of communication channels including, where possible, focus groups.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

Very good work was underway in developing leadership capacity in the school. The principal and deputy principal were very reflective leaders and regularly reviewed the effectiveness of processes that were in place. Distributed leadership was evident through the post structure, through teachers' involvement in committees and through a range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. The post holders reported that they were consulted about their duties and both post and non-post holders reported that they felt empowered and trusted to undertake tasks.

Management had provided opportunities for teachers to avail of professional learning in a number of areas. In addition to upskilling in areas of teaching and learning, teachers were also encouraged and enabled to take part in middle management courses and programmes that support student wellbeing.

The school was involved in the *Droichead* professional induction framework and provided placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers and the teacher education institution.

Student leadership was promoted in a variety of ways including the student council, the prefect system and class captains. Members of the council reported formally to the board on an annual basis. Senior students were involved in a mentoring or CAIRDE system for incoming first-year students. A range of extra and co-curricular activities such as Green Flags, Active Schools Flags, sporting teams, musicals and clubs provided other avenues where students could develop life skills outside the classroom.

## **3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing**

The quality of support for students' wellbeing was of a very high standard. A dedicated care team met regularly to agree on actions to support students. Key staff members such as the school chaplain and guidance counsellor were a valuable support to students throughout the year and very good partnerships had been developed with external agencies such as CAMHS and ISPCC to further support students at times of crisis. Student and parent surveys reported that there was a good atmosphere in the school and that students felt safe and cared for.

The school had worked on supporting students through times of transition, especially new first-year students. The CAIRDE system, where TY students provided advice and support to a small group, was reported to be very effective. Students reported that they found the broad curriculum, subject tasters and the wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities available to them very positive. They felt it was an indication of the effort that the school and teachers went to in order to provide them with a very positive experience of school life.

The school also promoted wellbeing through friendship week, bonding activities, retreats and the availability of a fitness suite for staff and students. Student voice was responded to in an effective manner. The student council has had a say in the uniform changes and the inclusion of additional sporting teams and additional bonding trips in recent times.



## 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;