



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

School name	Ratoath College
School address	Jamestown Ratoath Co. Meath
Roll number	76088T
Date of evaluation	17-11-2023
Date of issue of report	26/02/2024

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

The board of management 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.

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"> 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 Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023). 7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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.

the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE). 8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.	
--	--

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

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Date of inspection	17-11-2023
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with Board of Management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Ratoath College is a co-educational school under the joint trusteeship of Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and the Bishop of Meath and the patronage of LMETB. The school was established in 2005 and has rapidly grown in terms of student numbers and staff. There is a current enrolment of 1,160 students and the school provides the Junior Cycle, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and optional Transition Year (TY). The school also has special classes for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) known as Ionad Arkle.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with highly effective practice observed in a significant number of lessons: there was scope to enhance the depth of students' learning through strategically utilising some teaching approaches to challenge students and encourage them to reflect on their progress.
- High expectations were set for student achievement and teachers encouraged students to do their best.
- The overall quality of school management was good; aspects of strategic leadership to support curriculum provision, strategic planning for inclusive teaching and learning and student support systems required development.
- The senior management team demonstrated a very good capacity to lead and manage change; they worked very hard to overcome some school contextual issues including the ongoing provision of education during the COVID 19 pandemic and the building of relationships with parents.
- Staff and students were facilitated and encouraged to take on leadership roles; some roles need to be refined.
- The support for students' wellbeing was good with some very good practice evident; the school's mission statement of Mól an Óige was clearly identifiable in all interactions.

Recommendations

- To enhance student engagement and reflection, activities, tasks and assessment practices should be differentiated effectively to challenge and support all students.
- It is recommended that the school review their use of digital technologies through the development of a digital learning plan.
- A curriculum advisory group should be established to conduct an audit of curriculum provision, ensuring alignment with the school's growing needs: the efficacy of the action-

planning process supporting the development of teaching and learning should be reviewed by a school self-evaluation (SSE) core team.

- School management should review and develop its provision for special educational needs in line with Circular 0014/2017 and the relevant guidelines: further continuing professional development (CPD) in leading and managing inclusive education should be accessed.
- In line with the school's SSE obligation to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development cycle by 2025, an assessment of the effectiveness of key policies supporting wellbeing should be undertaken and a whole-school policy on inclusion should be developed.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of teaching and learning

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of teaching and learning was good overall, with highly effective practice observed in a significant number of lessons. Satisfactory practice was observed in a significant minority of lessons.

There was a range of teaching, learning and assessment approaches observed during the evaluation. In the majority of lessons, there was scope to enhance the depth of students' learning through the more strategic use of the chosen approaches. Where highly-effective practice was observed, the range of teaching and assessment approaches were used in a manner that facilitated deep levels of student understanding and reflection during the lesson. Further consideration should be given to how teaching approaches are used to facilitate highly-effective learning.

High-quality learner outcomes were evident when lesson content was linked to prior knowledge and supported by retrieval exercises or icebreakers. Optimal learning occurred when new concepts built incrementally on prior knowledge, thus accommodating diverse learners. Visual materials, spot demonstrations and exemplars effectively supported learning. The focus on gradual student ownership and responsibility were key successful teaching approaches implemented. The design of student tasks in facilitating high-quality learning required further consideration in a number of lessons.

Teacher explanations, when sufficiently paced and linked to student experiences, facilitated high-quality learning. However, student-task design required reconsideration in some lessons. Excellent practices involved planning activities in advance and facilitating purposeful student engagement. Media clips were effective when prompting questions for active listening were included. Plenaries following activities should ensure time for meaningful reflection.

A very good rapport was evident between teachers and students in all the lessons observed. Teachers encouraged students to do their best. However, low-level disruption occurred in some instances. Attention to seating arrangements, clear behaviour expectations and optimal use of class time is necessary. Setting teacher expectations when students are working digitally are also important and should be explicitly communicated to learners to avoid distractions.

Some very good reactive differentiation practice was noted in lessons. In all lessons, teachers provided additional help to students on request. To optimise the potential of this very good practice, teachers should also provide whole-class feedback based on the pattern of difficulties being experienced by students when completing tasks.

Lessons often followed a whole-class approach and students sometimes were waiting for others to complete tasks. To ensure that all students are supported to engage deeply and actively reflect on their progress, planned activities, tasks and assessment practices should be

sufficiently differentiated to appropriately challenge and support all students. Further attention should be given to the principles of universal design for learning in lesson planning.

Students were encouraged by teachers to manage and store information and some very good practice was evident in the maintenance and organisation of classwork. A review of student notebooks indicated a prevalence of note taking in class. The use of class time for students to transcribe notes from the board needs to be re-considered.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

There was evidence of advanced planning and preparation for all of the lessons observed. However, care should be taken to ensure that teachers' planning should make full use of the lesson period as, in a significant minority of lessons, there was scope to make better use of the full class time allocated.

There was some very good use of additional resources, such as visual material, templates, exemplars and handouts to support learning. In some lessons, there was an over-reliance on text-heavy resources, and opportunities were missed for deeper learning through the use of additional resources. Planning should target diverse student needs, interests and learning styles.

There was a good balance between teacher-led and student-led activity in almost all lessons with highly effective group work aligned to learning intentions. Care should be taken during lesson tasks to ensure that students have sufficient reflection time to complete tasks. Highly-effective lessons integrated key terms to support language access. A whole-school approach to supporting students whose first language is not English or whose literacy levels require additional support should be developed.

Teachers should explore how digital technologies can be used effectively to support learning. The reliance on trolleys of devices delayed progress in lessons. On other occasions, opportunities were missed in incorporating digital technologies to enhance students' learning. Teachers and students who met with the inspectors during the evaluation noted difficulties in progressing coursework due to their limited access to digital technologies. The school should review their use of digital technologies in teaching and learning through the development of a digital-learning plan.

Some very good formative assessment practices were observed. Where higher-order questioning was used to good effect, it allowed students to engage with and interrogate class material through debate and negotiation. Students were challenged to develop and justify their answers. Success criteria were co-created, which helped to set expectations for learning and promoted a higher level of student engagement.

Homework was routinely assigned and a good standard of oral feedback provided to students. However, formative assessment in written work was lacking. Teachers should identify further opportunities for providing formative feedback on students' written work. It is good practice that students were given opportunities to reflect on the feedback teachers provided as part of their summative assessments. Learners should be supported in using this information in target setting in the student journals.

Collaborative practice among teachers was generally good, facilitated by subject department structures and SSE processes. The school's online platform was a collaborative space for subject teams. The quality of subject planning for teaching and learning varied. Best practice occurred when the subject plans demonstrated clear links with relevant specifications and syllabuses and identified the development of key learning in terms of skills, understanding, and knowledge.

Some plans were underdeveloped and did not indicate the learning intended or the specific approaches, activities or assessment involved. Subject teams need to further develop the subject plans by reducing the number of learning outcomes within units of learning and focusing on identifying the key learning and specific assessment approaches, which assess the depth of

student learning. LCA programme plans ranged from good to fair, with room for improvement in differentiation and assessment planning.

Departments should develop the use of planning time to increase the focus on ongoing development of learning, teaching and assessment in addition to administrative and logistical planning. Subject teams analysed examination attainment data but a deeper level of analysis of emerging trends should guide the next phase of SSE.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

The overall quality of school management was good, aspects of strategic leadership to support curriculum provision, strategic planning for inclusive teaching and learning and student support systems, required development.

Leading learning and teaching

The trustees, management and staff of the school see the school as an integral and valued part of the growing community of Ratoath. The school has been well supported by LMETB. The senior management team (SMT) demonstrated a very good capacity to lead and manage change. Since the current management team commenced they have worked hard to overcome some school contextual issues including the ongoing provision of education during the COVID 19 pandemic and building relationships with parents. This was managed very well.

The school curriculum emphasised holistic development and offered a broad range of learning opportunities. A good range of subjects was provided at junior-cycle level, and level-two learning programmes (L2LP) have been added to the curriculum. There was a need to look at the provision of hours to support student wellbeing in order to better support learners and to meet curricular requirements.

While a broad range of subjects was provided at senior cycle, there was scope to extend the range of Leaving Certificate programmes on offer, to include exploring the re-introduction of LCVP and a more systematic approach to the provision of the LCA programme. A broad range of learning experiences was provided in TY and changes were made to the programme based on student feedback. Guidance was timetabled for the majority of students in senior cycle; however, the option block containing applied mathematics should be reconfigured to allow this group of students access guidance.

Senior management recognised the need to review in-house assessments given that adjustments to curriculum-based assessments (CBAs) will soon cease. The assessments of L2LPs should be reviewed to ensure they are in line with the principles of the programme. The board of management should set up an advisory board of studies to develop a strategic action plan for future curriculum provision.

School management had deployed teachers in accordance with their specific strengths and skills. The deployment of some teaching hours needs review. At the time of the evaluation, a significant number of hours allocated by the Department for supporting students with special education needs (SEN) were unused and teacher vacancies existed. School management should work with LMETB in order to urgently address this significant shortfall in provision for SEN.

School management and the Special Education Needs co-ordinator (SENCO) were committed to building a team of qualified specialists and there is a strong commitment to upskilling among staff. At the time of the evaluation, the SENCO oversaw coordination of the special classes and all mainstream SEN. There is a need to review the workload of the SENCO and review how the existing expertise can be optimally used to support provision for students with additional needs. The SEN anchor system should be further developed to distribute this workload.

The SENCO provided teachers with information regarding strategies for students with SEN; however, there was an absence of a weekly-timetabled core SEN team meeting. It is recommended that future core-team meetings be timetabled in order to facilitate attendance, co-ordination and planning of supports for SEN. Student-support files contained relevant information regarding student needs, actions taken and strategies that may prove useful to teachers in lessons. Targets and actions in the plans should be reviewed in order to provide incremental progression of support for learners.

The school had a small number of students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). An EAL coordinator was recently appointed and assessments were underway at the time of the evaluation; however, there is scope to improve coordination and planning by having the EAL coordinator teacher teach some EAL classes.

A range of interventions to support students with additional needs was observed during the evaluation. It was evident that planning of these interventions and the organisation of the groups should be more closely aligned to students' identified needs and those with the greatest level of need should be in receipt of the support. Additional CPD to support whole-school implementation of the continuum of support should be accessed.

A formal system for tracking student attainment was used by the *moltóirí* to identify students in need of support. There was scope for this system to be utilised more strategically in order to facilitate a broader picture of individual students and year-group attainment and inform improvements in teaching and learning. A template in the *Dialann* allowed students to track their own progress and students should be supported to make better use of this tool of analysis and reflection.

The school and the ETB provided an induction programme for new teachers at the start of the school year and a comprehensive staff handbook was in place. However, it was noted that procedures for the handover of classes were not always optimal, Senior management should review procedures for class handovers and include procedures on the supervision of students by unqualified teachers in order to optimise continuity in teaching and learning.

Managing the organisation

The board of management demonstrated a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the school and members were very supportive of the school's senior management team. The board displayed a high level of shared expertise and good procedures were in place for the development of policies. The board was well informed by the principal and it was highly commendable that the board had met with the student *cinnirí* team and staff who held positions of responsibility within the school.

The parent and teacher nominees had not received training at the time of the evaluation; there was a need for the board to engage with training as a group and this will assist in the development of their oversight and strategic leadership roles in the school. Enhancing the visibility of the board and parents' association was also raised in the questionnaire feedback received during the inspection.

Ratoath College is a rapidly-growing school and has experienced a considerable turnover of staff, including membership on the senior-management team. The principal was appointed over four years ago and has worked unwaveringly to lead and manage change in the school. The senior management team worked very well together, leadership roles were distributed and well delineated. There was a commendable blend of expertise among team members. Given that the school is now settled into the post-pandemic era, there is a need to strategically plan for future developments in curriculum provision and student-support systems.

The quality of school communication was very good overall and this was reflected in staff questionnaires. Parents, students and staff were familiar with the content of school policies and almost all parents who returned the survey were very happy with the quality of school reports.

The lack of a suitable management-information system was presenting significant challenges for the school in managing systems such as attendance, punctuality and implementation of the awards system. There is a need to review the operation of current administrative systems, particularly in relation to the management of students.

The well-maintained school building featured a vibrant learning environment, with good health and safety routines.

Leading school development

School management and staff showed a strong commitment to the school and were very focused on maintaining a learning environment where students were supported to achieve their potential in line with the school's mission statement *Mól an Óige*. A school improvement plan had been developed and was informed by staff, parent and student questionnaires. It was highly commendable that focus groups from the board, parents association, student *cinnirí* and staff were involved in the consultation process.

Areas for development identified in the school-improvement plan included teaching and learning with a focus on individual student achievement, developing teaching and learning strategies that facilitate all students to achieve their best, sustainability, and the development of assessment practices. Targets and actions were identified. It is now a timely juncture for a school self-evaluation review team to refine the targets and actions identified and oversee their implementation.

It is recommended that the board, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, oversee the school development priorities in a streamlined improvement plan. Achievement of each priority should be documented in the plan and progress reviewed regularly. The questionnaires administered, as part of this evaluation, can also be reviewed and included as part of the school's self-evaluation process.

Developing leadership capacity

The senior management team adopted a distributed leadership style. Staff were well supported in continuing professional development (CPD) and good practices were in place for the sharing of learning from external CPD as well as learning from colleagues. Processes to aid the embedding of highly-effective teaching and learning approaches at whole-school level require development.

A detailed needs' analysis informed the current schedule of posts. In the context of an expanding school, the roles and responsibilities for each post should be kept under review to ensure that duties are sufficiently aligned to meet the school's priorities, and commensurate with the post. A review of the current schedule of posts indicated a need to refine some posts to accommodate additional leadership roles in teaching and learning.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

The quality of support for students' wellbeing was good with some very good practice evident. The school's mission statement of *Mól an Óige* was evident in all interactions contributing to a positive atmosphere acknowledged by parents, teachers and students. Students had many opportunities for projects and leadership roles.

The wellbeing programme for Junior Cycle was delivered through the key curricular subjects of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Physical Education (PE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). Adequate provision was made for SPHE and relationships and sexuality education (RSE); however, questionnaire data indicated some inconsistencies, which

should be addressed in the context of collaborative planning for teaching and learning in these subjects.

Additional hours were used for tutorial and assembly time. Some good work had begun in developing a themed programme delivered during the tutorial period. To progress this programme further, it is recommended that a core team be established to lead the development of a more fully integrated assembly and tutorial programme, in consultation with students, *caomhnóirí* and the SPHE coordinator so that the programme supports experiential and incremental learning.

There was a need to explore how the ten-minute assembly period at the start of the school day operated. There were instances at morning assembly time when there were students at lockers, and unsupervised in classrooms; this should be addressed. The school should review the use of the additional wellbeing hours and bring them fully in line with current guidelines, and explore the potential to extend the breadth of the wellbeing programme through the provision of some additional modules.

Guidance counsellors provided strong support, with one-to-one opportunities and timetabled classes for senior students. A recent guidance fair held in the school received positive support from local businesses. The school provided a wide range of extra- and co-curricular activities such as the calm club at lunchtime, sports, and drama after school. Staff members were commended for their efforts and commitment in providing these opportunities.

A student-support team was in place, which met weekly, and *moltóirí* attended on a rotational basis. This meeting should be time-tabled. The *moltóir* and *caomhnóir* systems were key mechanisms in the identification of students' needs and their referral to support personnel such as the student-support team, the chaplain and the guidance counsellors.

A high awareness of policies, such as the code of behavior, RSE and anti-bullying policy were evident among staff, students and parents. While key policies supported student management and wellbeing, student questionnaire data indicated that there was a need to review the consistency of policy implementation, particularly the code of behavior and anti-bullying policies. The code of behavior emphasised restorative principles, and a merit system acknowledged students' efforts. There was a need for a more rigorous and qualitative approach to the implementation of this system.

It was commendable that, at the time of the evaluation, the SEN and guidance team was updating and merging the SEN and guidance policies to provide the basis for a policy on inclusion. This very worthwhile initiative should be used as an opportunity to develop a whole-school policy on inclusion. This review should be advanced through the school's SSE process as it will advance the wellbeing-promotion review and development cycle by 2025, guided by the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023*.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Ratoath College welcomes this affirming report. The Board wish to acknowledge and thank the entire school community for their positive engagement with the WSE-MLL process and commends the ongoing deep commitment, hard work and effort of all members of the school community. The Board is especially pleased to note that, as the school approaches the 20th anniversary of its establishment next year, the inspectors observed that the school's founding vision – *Mol an Óige* – continues to be "*clearly identifiable in all interactions*".

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

The Board are pleased to note that the inspectors recognise the senior leadership team's "*very good capacity to lead and manage change*" and the following actions and plans have been put in place since the inspectors' visit to give effect to the recommendations provided:

- Further whole school training has been provided to all staff, with ongoing training planned, in order to facilitate the ongoing development of practice in the area of differentiation.
- The school's Digital Learning Team has continued its work towards developing an updated Digital Learning Plan. The Board notes that the school has invested heavily in digital equipment since 2020 and an audit of available digital equipment is underway with additions planned pending funding from the Department of Education.
- The SSE Team continue the ongoing work of reviewing the efficacy of the action-planning process and plans are in place to bring together groups of staff, students and parents to review curricular provision in the context of ensuring alignment with the school's growing and changing needs into the future.
- School management, including the SENCO, have met and discussed the inspectors' observations and recommendations in relation to reviewing and developing provision for special educational needs. Whole staff training has taken place in the area of differentiation and members of the senior leadership team have engaged in CPD in the area of leading and managing inclusive education with further training planned. The Board notes that the school has assigned all of the resources currently at its disposal to support students with additional needs and that outstanding teacher vacancies are advertised. The Board notes that no effort has been or will be spared by the senior management team or the Human Resources department in LMETB in attempting to secure appropriately qualified teachers and that the factors that lead to the ongoing challenges in teacher recruitment are beyond the school's control.
- The development of the Whole School policy on inclusion, including an assessment of the effectiveness of key policies supporting wellbeing, was well underway prior to the inspectors' visit and this work continues towards the goal of the Whole School Inclusion policy, drawing together the SEN, Guidance and Wellbeing plans already in place, being ready for implementation in the next school year.

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;