



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Ballymakenny College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Ballymakenny Road Drogheda
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	91573N
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	27/01/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	28/04/2025

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 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.

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 	<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> or <i>Bí Cineálta (2024)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually. 2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils. 3. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment in line with their current policy. 4. All teachers visited report that they have read the school's current policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying.

<p>and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).</p> <p>7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE).</p> <p>8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.</p>	
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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	27/01/2025 – 29/01/2025
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with Board of Management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meeting(s) 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

Ballymakenny College is a co-educational community school under the shared patronage of the Louth and Meath Education and Training Board and Educate Together. Current student enrolment is 1003. The school provides the Junior Cycle Programme, Level 2 Learning Programme, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. The school has three special classes called Cú Chulainn to support students with autism.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed; in the best lessons, teachers had effectively planned a range of tasks to engage all learners, including opportunities for cooperative learning.
- The board and school leadership demonstrated a commendable level of commitment to the school and worked very effectively together to provide a very well-maintained learning environment offering a wide range of facilities.
- The school fostered a culture of reflection to support improvement, which was evident in teacher's collaborative planning and in supports developed to support student reflection.
- A broad range of subjects was provided to meet the needs of learners, however, there is room for further development in the breadth of curriculum offered at senior cycle.
- The quality of leadership and management was very good with exemplary distributed leadership practices and effective oversight by the school principal.
- The quality of support for student wellbeing was very good with highly effective pastoral supports in place; relationships and interactions around the school created and sustained a very positive, inclusive and affirming environment.

Recommendations

- Differentiated approaches that effectively scaffold learning and provide sufficient challenge should be incorporated by teachers into all lessons.
- The school had engaged effectively in school self-evaluation (SSE); it is now timely to focus improvement practices on key identified priorities.
- The introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied, recognised by the school as a key priority, should now be advanced.

- The school should engage in ongoing monitoring and review of planning and provision for special education support, specifically in the area of targeted in-class support that includes co-teaching.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In almost all lessons visited, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good or better. In a few lessons, there were instances of excellent practices.

A key strength across all lessons was the high-quality relationships that teachers fostered with students. Mutually respectful teacher-student rapport contributed to students' excellent behaviour and also supported students' sense of wellbeing within lessons. Students were encouraged and affirmed for their efforts and a positive learning environment was evident in all lessons.

In most classrooms, teachers had arranged desks that were conducive to student collaboration. This was an area of focus in the school's SSE process to support group-work strategies.

While some good examples of learning intentions were observed, teachers often referred to them using different and, at times, confusing terms. There is scope for a more consistent approach to framing the students' learning. In a few lessons, lesson content, as opposed to what students were expected to know or be able to do at the end of the lesson, was shared. Highly effective learning was noted when the learning intentions were differentiated and were linked clearly to success criteria. Learning intentions should be revisited during lessons to enable students to actively reflect on their learning and allow teachers to assess progress.

In the best lessons, there was excellent use of starter tasks and explicit linking of lesson topics to students' own experiences and interests, such as well-known local buildings and sports' events. This helped students to engage with the topic and build confidence in themselves as learners.

In a number of lessons, there was a focus on key words to support students' learning. A very good example of this strategy was when one teacher facilitated the students to engage with exam vocabulary and terminology.

There was a commendable emphasis on representing learning in different ways and this had a positive impact on students' engagement and interest. There were some good examples of collaborative learning observed, such as 'think, pair, share', placemat activities and some group work. Where group work had been carefully structured and informed by the teacher's overall plan, the learner outcomes were of a high quality, particularly when students were given an opportunity to think critically and share their learning with others in the class. This supports whole-school development of co-operative group work, an area of priority in the schools' self-evaluation process. Consideration of how this structured group work approach might be best utilised to support co-teaching should be explored. In the best lessons, teachers used varied methodologies to support student engagement such as online quizzes, video and audio clips.

Some very good instances of independent learning were observed, such as developing students' own perspectives. These were most effective when learners were allocated ample time to develop and discuss their views with each other. In the best lesson observed, students were facilitated to engage in note-making rather than transcribing notes from the data projector.

In many lessons, digital learning technologies (DLT) were used to present material, display the textbook and share content with students. There was excellent practice in the use of the school's digital platform for sharing resources and lesson content as well as giving feedback to students; this was a particular strength of the school. However, in many lessons, there was scope to further exploit the potential of DLT to support learner engagement and to move beyond the use of DLT for display purposes. The student focus group indicated that they would

welcome further opportunities to engage in research tasks on devices and the opportunity to display and demonstrate their learning on devices.

Teachers individual and collective practice

The overall quality of teachers' individual practice was very good. This included practice that was effective and a minority of lessons, which required improvement.

Lessons were generally well prepared, with a good range of resources selected. Highly effective lessons were well paced, and the selected tasks and activities were appropriate to all students' needs. The benefits of one-hour lessons were evident where teachers structured the lesson effectively to ensure consolidation of learning through active student participation throughout the lesson.

There was good use of targeted questioning to assess students' understanding and students, in general, responded well to this, as they were enabled to participate through the selection of personalised and appropriately challenging questions. Best practice was observed when the questions posed facilitated students to apply and evaluate information with their peers. A greater use of higher-order questions with appropriate wait time would further develop learner experience and encourage critical thinking skills.

Other forms of assessment, such as show-me boards and graphic organisers to support students in organising their ideas, were used well. Many lessons observed facilitated opportunities for students to consider and reflect on their learning, and in the best examples, carefully considered success criteria supported these reflections. Some very good examples of written formative feedback were evident in sample copybooks. The school prioritised the use of the school platform to share notes and other resources with students but also set work in copy books and handouts distributed. It is now timely to consider consistent strategies and systems across the school to support students in storing, organising and presenting their work. Clear guidelines should be developed on how students might align their online work with the work in copybooks.

In some lessons, the design of student tasks required further consideration, particularly when the choice of task did not meet the learning needs of all students. Best practice was apparent when activities made optimal use of students' prior knowledge. In some lessons, the time assigned to tasks was too long and there was scope to rebalance the length of time assigned. In the context of one-hour lessons, further attention should be given to the design of student tasks to ensure that activities are sufficiently differentiated and facilitate incremental learning.

In the very best lessons, teachers were cognisant of the spectrum of students' needs, but this was not consistent across all the lessons observed. In general, the area of in-class support and the differentiation of learning tasks and activities needs development. In some lessons, the learning was not sufficiently accessible for some learners or appropriately challenging for others. In a few lessons, optimal use was not made of cooperative teaching and this is an area for development for the school. All lessons should be planned in a manner that supports the individualised learning needs of students with additional needs, and tasks should be developed with their identified learning needs in mind. To ensure that all students are supported to engage actively in lessons, teachers should plan lessons considering the diverse needs within the group and should identify and incorporate approaches that support all students to engage actively in learning.

Collaborative practice among teachers was generally of a high standard, as evident in subject department plans which were reflective and improvement focused. It is commendable that there is whole-school support to strengthen subject team meetings in considering and reflecting on best practice.

Teachers valued and engaged in professional learning and contributed to building whole-school capacity by sharing their learning and expertise with colleagues. Consideration should now be given to how to plan strategically and cohesively so that professional learning opportunities align with identified school priority areas.

The school's digital plan positively influenced curriculum planning for teaching, learning, and assessment by facilitating reflection and the sharing of expertise. The school had provided subject teams with attainment data and some subject teams discussed and documented how the data could be used to inform improvement in teaching and learning.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

The overall quality of leadership and management was very good; the senior management team (SMT) demonstrated exemplary distributed leadership practices and communicated a strong vision for the school. They worked together in a highly effective manner.

Leading learning and teaching

A culture of reflection was fostered in the school; a curriculum action plan and a subject-specific improvement plan with subject-specific actions aligned to the school's SSE process had been developed and shared by the SMT. This planning supported reflection by subject departments. Approaches to support reflection by students included the development of a range of reflection stems to enable students to reflect on their learning and assessments as part of SSE.

At the time of the evaluation, the school had three special classes (Cú Chulainn) for students with autism. Three teachers coordinated Cú Chulainn, and they were supported by the senior management team, and a deputy principal with defined responsibilities for these classes. Cú Chulainn provided a bright, well-organised environment, which made effective use of visual schedules and audio-visual resources to create a welcoming and positive learning environment appropriate to the needs of students. Clear communication procedures and documentation of identified needs and progress achieved were maintained by staff. Staff in Cú Chulainn engaged in regular professional learning and had supported their mainstream colleagues by leading in-house professional learning.

The school provided the Junior Cycle and the L2LP programme, and at senior cycle, an optional Transition Year, the established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme were available. At the time of inspection, only students with exemptions from Irish could access the LCVP. It is recommended that the school further explore how to make LCVP available to a broader cohort of students. The school had recognised that there is real potential to develop the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in the school. The school should now focus on expanding access to a broader curriculum to support students who would benefit from the LCA programme, helping them to achieve success and build their confidence as learners.

A well-planned and organised TY programme was developed by a core group of teachers, with highly effective oversight by a programme coordinator and the senior management team. This programme provided excellent opportunities for students to engage in a wide variety of learning experiences, including water safety, drone photography and film studies. The school should build on the highly effective practices evident in the TY programme as it introduces a broader range of senior cycle programmes.

The senior management team supported teacher development through the provision of a wide variety of professional learning opportunities, which included both in-house and external engagements. In-house professional learning included the facilitation of sessions by teachers on a range of topics, including digital learning technology and support for students with autism. The highly positive feedback on professional learning for inclusive teaching indicated that teachers found it very valuable and were supportive of the desire for additional professional learning in this area.

Participants in a student focus group conducted during the inspection indicated that they found their teachers very helpful and approachable. Student surveys further amplified this key strength of the school in establishing and maintaining respectful relationships that support learner outcomes and experiences.

Managing the organisation

The school environment was maintained to an excellent standard supported by students and staff who took great pride in their school. Responses to surveys administered during the inspection and the focus group discussions indicate that parents view the school as well run.

The board of management met regularly and maintained accurate records. All members had engaged in training relevant to their roles. The board worked well together to establish and bring the school's mission statement and ethos to the fore in decision-making.

The board supported the development of leadership capacity of both students and staff by inviting them to make presentations to the board periodically. These presentations have included presentations on achievements of staff and on educational trips by students and have assisted in communicating the role of the board and in developing relationships between the board and school community.

The Support for Learning team consisted of a group of core teachers led by the coordinator, who met regularly and were successful in their communications. The learning support team used the continuum of support and students moved between levels on the continuum of support, based on collaborative review.

Very good work in creating, documenting and communicating students' identified learning needs was undertaken by the support team. This should now be consolidated and supported by developments in planning for co-teaching so that students' identified learning needs and targets are actively supported and progress recorded by teachers providing in-class support. A significant proportion of teachers in the school were engaged in the provision of in-class support, and as the predominant form of support offered, it should be monitored and reviewed to ensure its effectiveness. The *Guidelines for Post Primary Schools - Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes* and *Indicators for Effective Practice for Post Primary Schools* will be helpful in reviewing in-class support and ensuring the use of differentiation strategies that include aligning tasks to specific student needs and cooperative learning approaches that support all learners.

The school operated a 1:1 mobile device usage scheme, complemented by the use of paper resources. Parents reflected that this approach worked well for their children, particularly for those students who accessed assistive technology support provided by the devices. A detailed Digital Learning Plan was developed and reflected the school's advanced stage of digital engagement.

The respectful, collegial and supportive relationships fostered in the school were evident in the manner in which the board, school leadership and the wider school community responded actively, sensitively and purposefully to a number of challenging situations early in the school's development.

As the school moves from a period of rapid growth to consolidation, it is recommended that the board develop a schedule of policy review to ensure that policies are systematically reviewed to meet the current needs of the school.

Leading school development

Dignity, respect and positive relationships were cornerstones of the school vision. This was communicated very effectively by the senior management team through the leadership structures and regular communication systems developed. Respectful and positive interactions with the school community were observed throughout the period of the inspection.

The school had developed their SSE approach on six identified pillars with corresponding committees. Committees met regularly and provided input at staff meetings. Very good examples of collaborative learning were evident in lessons. Student and staff consultation, as well as past inspection reports, gave a clear rationale and focus for the area of focus in SSE. Specific targets to develop and improve group work were identified and actions to achieve these targets were communicated very effectively to staff. It is now timely for the school to build on this approach to further streamline its SSE processes. The findings from internal and external evaluation will be useful in identifying overarching areas of focus, for example, the need to develop practice in differentiated teaching strategies. Consideration should be given to merging committees to support the manageability and sustainability of the school improvement process.

The school had an active parents' association. The parents' association met regularly and used a blended online and face to face approach which to facilitate maximum engagement, on foot of a review of attendance following the pandemic. Recent initiatives included the introduction of a 'uniform swap' where outgrown uniforms were exchanged in the school.

Developing leadership capacity

There is very good support for developing leadership capacity in the school.

The senior management team, comprising the principal and three deputy principals, worked well together, and roles were distributed according to the identified strengths of the team. This work was overseen by the principal and monitored through regular informal and formal meetings. The very good practice of duty rotation should be continued to support the building of capacity across the team.

Leadership capacity was further developed through the collaborative review of posts and the provision of opportunities for staff to lead professional learning in the school through 'TeachMeets'. A robust middle management structure, which provided opportunities for post holders to lead school improvement was developed by the senior management team, led by the principal, and contributed to a shared sense of purpose and leadership capacity across the school.

The school had a democratically-elected student council that met regularly. Participation in elections to the student council was encouraged by ensuring that students who were not elected to representative roles were invited to participate as members of the council.

Peer reading and peer teaching between TY and first-year students in SPHE provided excellent opportunities for developing student leadership. Student leadership was further supported by participation in the Green Schools' committee and the Amber Flag committee. Extra-curricular activities, including a wide range of sports, LEGO, chess and music clubs provided valuable additional opportunities for students to develop their leadership capacity.

The school had an attractive library and had invested in a digital literacy application to encourage a culture of reading.

The school continues to develop links with the local community, including local basketball and GAA teams, as well as links fostered through transition year work experience and the WALK PEER programme offered in Cú Chulainn, which supports progression to the world of work.

A review of posts or responsibility to identify needs and priorities was conducted recently. The schedule of posts should be kept under ongoing review to ensure it meets the needs of the school in a balanced manner to support teaching and learning most effectively.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

The overall quality of provision of supports for students' wellbeing was very good. Teachers, supported by senior management, demonstrated very high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of students.

The Guidance and Counselling Department offered students one-to-one counselling support and careers' advice. Students could request an appointment with the guidance counsellor at any stage throughout the school year. A dedicated area on the school website provided accessible and clear information to support subject choice and to request an appointment. The Guidance department used the curriculum of support effectively, and a comprehensive guidance plan had been developed. The guidance department was engaging with the school community on the use of assessment data to support academic target-setting. Responses to surveys indicated that both parents and students were very satisfied with the level of support they received in subject choice.

A coordinated approach to relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and SPHE provision was in place, and training was underway to support provision. *Treoir* (guidance) time was allocated to the first twelve minutes of the school day and provided an opportunity for students to meet with their class tutor and to reflect on aspects of wellbeing anchored in themed weeks. The themes developed were aligned to national initiatives, for example, Maths week and Stand Up week. Curricular planning for junior cycle wellbeing was excellent; students engaged with SPHE and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) short courses, 135 hours of PE and a module on Digital Wellbeing. There was very effective use of the school journal to support wellbeing.

Student wellbeing was supported by a tutor and a house leader. A programme of active consent developed by the University of Galway for senior students and a water safety programme for all students was introduced in response to identified wellbeing needs.

First-year parents were invited to attend a coffee morning in the first term to introduce them to the school community and to respond to any concerns they might have. Relevant staff members visited local primary schools to gather information to support student transitions and to share information about the school. A taster programme for first years and a further taster for Transition Year students were provided. These structures helped to ensure successful transitions between and across learning settings.

The school's code of behaviour included a system of merits and demerits, which were allocated through the school's digital administration system. Students who participated in the student focus group said that they would like greater consistency regarding the allocation of merits. Surveys conducted as part of the evaluation indicated that parents felt that the code of behaviour was clearly communicated, which is commendable. It is now timely for the school to conduct a full review of the code of behaviour to include consultation with parents, students and teachers. This would support the development of a code of behaviour that is fully reflective of the spirit of the school.

Attendance was identified by the school as a priority. Significant work was undertaken to identify and support chronic non-attendance, and partnerships and connections with external support agencies were developed. The school indicated that it was due to undertake a review of its attendance policy; it would be useful to develop an attendance strategy as part of this review. The supports developed by the Tusla Education Support Service as part of the National School Attendance Campaign 2023 /2024 will prove helpful in this regard.

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	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	Provision that is very good is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

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 Ballymakenny College welcomes the findings of the Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning report.

We are particularly pleased that the report recognises the quality of teaching and learning across the school, the strong culture of reflection and collaboration, and the very high standard of leadership and management.

The affirmation of the inclusive and caring environment that underpins student wellbeing is especially valued. The Board also acknowledges the commendation of our distributed leadership model and the high level of professional engagement among staff. The inspection was a positive and affirming experience, and the Board expresses its appreciation of the constructive and professional approach taken throughout the process. We are committed to building on the strengths identified to further enhance the learning experience and outcomes for all students.

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 Board of Management acknowledges the four recommendations outlined in the inspection report and is committed to addressing them as part of our ongoing school development work. Our school remains committed to continuous improvement for the benefit of all learners.