



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Boherbue Comprehensive School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Boherbue Comprehensive School Boherbue Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	81009B
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	09-03-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	15/09/2023

# 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<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 2017.</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 2017.</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, 2017.</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>

<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.

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# Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

<b>Date of inspection</b>	09-03-2023
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <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

Boherbue Comprehensive School was founded in 1973 following the amalgamation of two local schools. The school is under the joint trusteeship of the Diocese of Kerry and the Minister for Education. It is a co-educational school serving a wide catchment area in north Cork with students drawn from a large number of feeder primary schools. At the time of the evaluation the school had four special classes for students with autism and a steadily growing student enrolment of 437 students, slightly more than half of whom were girls. The school's motto "Ó fhás go hAois" emphasises the school as a caring environment for students from their first day in the school.

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- A very good range of learning experiences was in evidence with active learning methodologies, the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning and team teaching, all being used to provide a rich educational experience to students.
- Very positive relationships were modelled in classroom interactions and the rapport between teachers and students in the school was excellent.
- The senior leadership team exhibited highly effective leadership of all aspects of school life and their leadership of teaching and learning, in collaboration with the middle management teams, was very good.
- School self-evaluation was operating very effectively in the school.
- The breadth of curriculum on offer and the subject choices available to students were very good.
- A very good level of support for students and for students' wellbeing was evident with many excellent practices noted throughout the school.
- The organisation and functioning of the special educational needs (SEN) and care teams was excellent.

### Recommendations

- As the use of differentiation in teaching has been identified by the school as a key means of providing support for students, greater use of differentiation in task assignment should be used to complement the very good teaching and learning strategies being used in the school.

- As the parents association has not functioned effectively for the past two years, the need to revitalise the association should be viewed as a priority item for senior management and the board of management.

## Detailed findings and recommendations

### 1. The quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good.

#### Learner outcomes and experiences

Learner outcomes were consistently positive in all lessons with high levels of student engagement noted. Teachers routinely shared the learning intention at the start of most lessons, although in some 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. Where the learning intention was explicit, this facilitated review of the lesson at its conclusion, allowing students and teachers to reflect on whether the learning intentions had been achieved. More widespread use of student-generated success criteria was recommended in some lessons.

The high quality of lesson preparation by teachers included the preparation of a wide range of very useful resource materials and the planning of a very good variety of tasks. This kept students very well engaged in their learning and ensured high levels of motivation to learn. The tasks assigned were at appropriate levels of difficulty, bearing in mind students' age and stage of learning and prior learning, and high expectations were set by teachers. While many of the tasks set allowed for differentiated responses from students, greater use of differentiation in task assignment, particularly facilitating student choice, was recommended. This is particularly important in view of the emphasis which the school has placed on differentiation as a means of providing support to students.

Students showed a very good ability to work individually, in pairs and in small groups when required to do so and best practice was observed where the formation of groups was fluid. Students were confident and knowledgeable when talking about their learning in engagements with inspectors. Good links were expertly established with students' own interests and some excellent examples of student-led learning were observed.

The use of digital technologies in teaching and learning was clearly very well managed and was a notable strength in the school. Apart from excellent use of these technologies by teachers, including the use of the school's shared learning platform, students frequently used digital technologies as part of their learning. This was highly commended as it engaged students and facilitated their autonomy in the learning process.

#### Teachers individual and collective practice

Teaching strategies used by teachers were very good overall and were very well suited to students' learning needs. A very good range of learning experiences was provided with active learning methodologies to the fore. Classroom based activities such as think-pair-share, the use of whiteboards, placemats and group work were used effectively and ensured that all students were confident to engage with all lessons. A very good use of assessment for learning was seen in many lessons, complemented by a range of very effective formative assessment strategies.

Very good team teaching was observed with excellent collaboration evident between teachers. This worked very well as a means of providing support to students, particularly in mixed ability classes. Teachers skilfully varied the roles of lead and support teacher in these lessons, thereby ensuring students received high levels of support in completing the tasks set. Frequent opportunities were also provided for students to assist each other, which they did with ease. This was commended.

Teachers were very knowledgeable in their subject areas and had engaged in regular continuing professional development (CPD) with the support of school management. The quality of lesson preparation was excellent and included a wide range of well-chosen resource materials. Lessons were presented as part of a coherent block of learning. Clear links were established to previous and future lessons as well as, frequently, to students' own lives and experiences. This greatly enhanced the learning experience for students.

Classroom management was very good with very positive relationships apparent in all lessons. Students received regular affirmation for their efforts and where students were not achieving the learning outcomes of the lesson, teachers sensitively provided feedback and guidance to help them to succeed. Teachers skilfully handled digressions from the lesson objective to allow other, very valuable learning opportunities to emerge. Thus a mathematics lesson dealt with cartoon animation for a brief period and a history lesson dealt with calligraphy, the latter led by a student. All of this was very worthwhile and added to the richness of the learning experience as well as providing opportunities for cross-curricular learning.

Teachers used questioning very effectively to elicit learning with a good mix of higher and lower order questions as well as directed and general questions. This had the effect of keeping all students involved and engaged in their learning. Students were also very willing to ask questions of their own and these were well handled by teachers. A good focus on key words and terms was observed at both junior cycle and senior cycle.

Teachers collaborated effectively. This was evident through their involvement in team teaching and through the formal subject department structures, with valuable informal collaboration also taking place. While subject planning was very good overall, with a consistency of structure noted in the areas covered by subject plans, some generic material contained in plans could be updated. It would also be useful to consider the inclusion of a developmental section to subject plans, outlining the short, medium and long term goals for the subject in the school. This could serve as a useful roadmap for the regular subject department meetings which take place. It was also recommended that planning for the new specifications for Physical Education (PE) and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at junior cycle should be progressed as these specifications are due to come into effect from September 2023.

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

The overall quality of school leadership and management was very good

### **Leading learning and teaching**

Highly effective leadership of teaching and learning was observed from both the senior leadership and middle management teams. Teachers' attendance at CPD events was facilitated and a very wide range of initiatives had been implemented, of which the Forbairt and Instructional Leadership initiatives and the promotion of the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning were particularly noteworthy.

A very clear, management-led focus on co-operative learning and differentiation was evident and much of this had been implemented through the school's involvement in school self-evaluation (SSE) which was operating very effectively. As part of the Forbairt project, the use of games in teaching and learning was chosen in order to help students build relationships and improve their negotiating skills, post Covid. The development of literacy and numeracy skills, as well as a clear focus at junior cycle on the development of key skills, was also well planned. The only area for development with regard to SSE was target setting. It was recommended that all targets should be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound) as this will assist in monitoring the impact of any initiatives.

A very strong focus on inclusion and flexibility in the leadership of teaching and learning was evident. The introduction of Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) was aimed at providing the broadest possible education options for students. The fact that the school had four special classes for students with autism was testament to the clear desire, expressed by school management, that all young people from the locality should have the opportunity to be educated locally, thereby not having to travel long distances to another school to cater for their needs.

As part of the school's involvement in the *Droichead* framework, which is a professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers, some peer observation of teaching and learning had taken place. The senior leadership team expressed an interest in further expanding peer observation and this was encouraged. The management of the implementation of recommendations from previous inspection reports was very thorough with very good whole-school practices observed.

Effective formal communication systems were in place and much sharing of information took place by way of informal networks also. The senior leadership team were very visible on the school corridors at break times and were very accessible to all members of the school community.

### **Managing the organisation**

The school's board of management was properly constituted and functioned very effectively. Board members were keenly aware of their responsibilities and a clear sense of commitment to the school and the need for the school to operate as a fulcrum of the local community, was apparent. The fact that the board got reports from post holders and others involved in leading school initiatives at each board meeting was commended, as this helped the board to remain well-informed on all aspects of school life. The board kept very much abreast of teaching and learning in the school and was very supportive of any new initiatives regarding teaching and learning. An agreed report of board proceedings for staff and parents was made available on the school's website in order to provide information to the wider school community.

A wide-range of policies had been developed and implemented and it was positive to note that the board also had a schedule for review of existing policies. Some amendments were suggested to the school's enrolment documentation to bring it into line with the school ethos and the very good inclusive practices that operated in the school. There was also a need to adapt some generic elements of the enrolment documentation to ensure it accurately reflected the procedures that operated in the school.

The school had a clear focus on catering for diversity and the inclusion of all students and this was led by the board. The breadth of the curriculum offered was mentioned positively by students during the focus group interview and the students also felt that the subject options process was very well-managed and was student centred. In this regard the opportunity to try out some Leaving Certificate subjects in TY allowed students to make more informed choices for the Leaving Certificate. Music and Physics had been added in recent years and the school plans to introduce Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) in September 2023.

The senior leadership team in the school operated highly effectively, exhibiting excellent leadership and management skills. They collaborated very well in all aspects of their work, displaying complementary skill sets and supporting each other very well. They activated the professional expertise and experience of staff members in encouraging and supporting the many staff-led initiatives that were in place in the school and it was clear that they valued the insights provided by all members of the school community.

Good structures were in place to ensure parents were kept informed on all aspects of school life and draft policies were sent to parents for comment before being adopted. There were very good assessment and reporting structures in place and the fact that the principal read all reports sent to parents to ensure that they contained formative commentary was particularly commended. The parents' association previously had a significant impact on school life and had been involved in many valuable initiatives in the school, such as fundraising for the book lending scheme, in the recent past. However, in the past two years, due to the impact of Covid and the fact that the children of some key members of the association had finished their schooling, the school has found it difficult to form a parents association. The need to re-vitalise the association should be viewed as a priority for the school and all members of the school community are encouraged to work toward this end.

### **Leading school development**

Many building initiatives, aimed at keeping the school's facilities up to date, have taken place in recent years including an extension to PE hall and the building of an astro-turf pitch. The school's place as central to the local community has been underscored by the building of the astro-turf pitch as many local groups were involved in fundraising for its development. The local

primary school and local GAA club were frequent users of the facility. Plans were also in place for an extension to the main school building and students expressed a wish that canteen facilities be incorporated into this development, and this was part of the plan. The local community facilitates many work experience and work shadowing opportunities for TY and LCA students of the school and also facilitates community service opportunities.

Notwithstanding the fact that the parents association had not been functioning effectively for the past two years, parents' responses to questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation were overwhelmingly positive about the school with particularly high levels of agreement recorded to the statement 'Overall, I am happy with the school'. Student questionnaire responses were similarly positive.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

Very good levels of consultation had taken place with the student council regarding matters such as the wearing of hoodies, student identity cards and reusable water bottles to name a few. Students interviewed as part of the evaluation expressed the view that their opinions were valued and acted upon by the senior leadership team. They felt that they had opportunities to develop their own leadership skills and, as an example, cited the fact that students who went on a recent trip to Kolkata in India had to organise their own fundraising event to support this venture. They also noted that this charitable venture highlighted the emphasis which the school places on caring for others.

CPD for teachers was encouraged and fully supported both by the senior leadership team and the board. All teachers interviewed mentioned seeing themselves as having the ability and the scope to lead initiatives, with the approval of management. A function of this positive approach to distributed leadership in the school had been the emergence of a variety of initiatives which had enhanced the learning experience of students, such as: the increased use of digital technologies in teaching and learning; the use of board games to enhance co-operation among students; and work relating to instructional leadership. Discussions about teaching and learning take place at each staff meeting and management had ensured that teachers who had attended CPD were provided with opportunities to share their learning with fellow staff members. Thus staff members had received input from colleagues on the use of graphic organisers and the use of whiteboards in teaching and learning as well as using strategies such as think, pair, share. All staff were then asked to go away from staff meeting and implement one strategy to see how it worked. This was commended as very good practice as it created an expectation of progression and improvement in all teachers' practice while simultaneously respecting the right and agency of the individual teacher to select the strategy that they felt was most suitable for them or their subject area. The overwhelmingly positive responses to the teacher questionnaire distributed as part of the evaluation were indicative of a committed and enthusiastic staff with a deep sense of loyalty to the school and to its students.

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

The quality of supports for students' wellbeing was very good with many excellent practices noted throughout the school.

The very positive relationships among students and the respectful student-teacher interactions and rapport were a feature of all lessons observed. These positive inter-personal relationships provided the foundation for the very good levels of student support and were a key strength of the school. The school's code of behaviour was a very positive document with the rationale for all rules clearly explained. This contributed to a healthy respect for school rules among students and their behaviour, both during and outside of classes, was excellent.

Learning support for students was very good and support for students with special educational needs (SEN) was very well organised. Support was provided to students on a needs basis, not just exclusively focussed on their academic needs. Teaching methodologies had a clear focus on differentiation and inclusion. Key documents were shared with staff and this helped to keep teachers informed of student needs and difficulties. This helped teachers to set student targets within the mainstream classes and to collaborate with the special education team to develop a programme of work and identify appropriate, supportive teaching methodologies. Regular meetings took place between special education teachers and the special education team leader



and conscientious efforts were made to keep parents informed about their child's progress and to ensure they were consulted regarding any changes in the level of support being provided.

Students with SEN were celebrated and included in all aspects of school life and the relatively recent acquisition of a therapy dog has had a palpable, positive impact throughout the school. The initiative of the school in deciding to take on the therapy dog, and the willingness of a staff member to house the dog and bring it to school every day, were highly commended. The work of the SEN and care teams has ensured that the stated aim of creating an environment of growth and belonging through the pastoral care structure, was being achieved.

The transition of students into the school was very well managed and included the introduction of a 'buddy system' where senior students took on a mentoring role to first year students. A meeting also took place with parents of first year students after their child had spent a month in the school to identify any difficulties the student was having in settling into the school. This was very positive.

The school was very responsive to needs of students post Covid, as surveys of students revealed higher than normal levels of anxiety. The school addressed students' personal and world concerns and very good interventions were put in place in a range of areas. Among these was the opportunity for students to select topics to be dealt with during wellbeing lessons, an approach which the school felt was more appropriate to students' needs. The school's wellbeing plan was very comprehensive and it was noted that wellbeing indicators for teaching and learning were a feature of all subject plans. Additionally, teachers were asked to be particularly mindful of specific topics at various points during the year. As an example, during the school's 'Stand up Awareness Week' specific learning objectives for each subject were set. This was very good practice.

The school's emphasis on academic achievement was complemented by the wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities available, which were made possible by the commitment of a large number of teachers. Interviews with students and responses to student questionnaires showed that students felt there was some extra-curricular activity available to them no matter what their area of interest. They also commented favourably on the high levels of dedication and care provided by their teachers.

## 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;