



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St. Ailbe's School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Rosanna Road Tipperary Town
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	72480W
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	27/03/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	16/09/2025

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 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>
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).	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.

7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE). 8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.	
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The school met the requirements in relation to checks 1 to 6 and check 8 of the child protection checks. It did not meet the requirements of check 7 of the child protection checks. However, the school subsequently furnished evidence of compliance with this requirement. The school met all the requirements in relation to the anti-bullying checks above.

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Dates of inspection	24/03/2025 - 27/03/2025
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principals • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus groups	• 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

St Ailbe's School is a co-educational school under the patronage of Tipperary Education and Training Board (ETB). At the time of the evaluation, it had an enrolment of 653 students and offered the Junior Cycle, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE). The school had two special classes for students with autism and it participated in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- A key strength of the school was the positive, respectful relationships between all members of the school community.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good; committed teachers engaged in professional learning opportunities and shared their expertise with their peers.
- The quality of leadership and management was very good; leadership teams ensured the smooth running of the school and strategically planned for future developments and school improvement.
- The board of management was committed to students' welfare and ensured that students were at the centre of all decisions made.
- Substantial work had been done to identify DEIS targets, explore potential actions and monitor the impact of these actions.
- The quality of support for students' wellbeing was very good; the school placed a significant focus on enhancing wellbeing protective factors and minimising wellbeing risk factors.
- There was a vast array of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to cater for all students and their varied interests.

Recommendations

- While the school had identified actions to improve attendance and attainment in its DEIS plan, these actions were generally focused outside the classroom. The school should now expand these actions to include a whole-school teaching and learning focus to support the achievement of its DEIS targets.

- In some lessons, students were unclear about the purpose of the tasks set and in others, teacher voice predominated. To improve student engagement, teachers should ensure a balance between teacher input and student voice and should plan activities that are clearly linked to the intended learning.
- In many of the lessons observed, students were not being appropriately challenged by the lesson content or the questions posed. To promote deeper learning and to develop students' critical thinking skills, teachers should design activities that enable all students to engage in tasks at a suitably challenging level.
- Where subject department plans were in need of development, the subject teachers should collaborate to clearly identify the key learning to be achieved and to design specific assessment tasks aligned to that key learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good; committed teachers engaged in professional learning opportunities and shared their expertise with their peers.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Classroom interactions were characterised by a positive atmosphere and a mutual respect between teachers and students. As a result, students were willing to risk-take, were comfortable contributing comments and ideas, and were confident in both answering and asking questions.

Where learner experience was at its best, there was a balance between student voice and teacher input. In these lessons, students were given opportunities to connect their learning to their own lives and to the local area, while teachers made a conscious effort to link concepts to students' interests. Student learning was further supported by the provision of time at the end of activities to reflect on and consolidate related learning. In some of these lessons, students were supported to develop their creative, problem-solving, and communication skills. Where lessons were more teacher-led, there was less opportunity for skill development, and in these lessons, students were less engaged and motivated. Teachers should ensure that they dedicate sufficient time during lessons to student voice and to the development of skills through student-led activities.

In the most successful lessons, the learning to be achieved was discussed at the outset of the lesson, enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning. This was supported by activities that elicited on-the-spot evidence of learning, accompanied by teacher feedback that moved learning forward. In these instances, students were engaged and enthusiastic. In some lessons, although the students were participating in activities, the purpose of these tasks was unclear, and as a result, students were less focused. When designing tasks, teachers should clearly link the task to the intended learning and share its purpose with the students.

Where best practice was observed, student tasks and activities were very carefully planned and designed to challenge all students to extend their learning. In many lessons, however, not all students were suitably challenged by the tasks set or by the questions posed. To promote deeper learning and to develop students' critical thinking skills, teachers should plan and design activities and potential extension questions that enable students of all abilities to engage at a suitably challenging level.

Where students used digital tools they demonstrated a high level of competency and proficiency. In most instances, digital technology was used primarily by the teacher to present information, on a few occasions students and teachers very successfully used digital technology as a formative assessment tool and in other highly effective lessons students were supported to develop their computer literacy and research skills. There is significant potential to increase student-led use of technology where relevant to enhance learning by building on this highly effective practice; the digital learning and the teaching and learning committees should collaborate to explore how this could best be incorporated into regular student experience.

Teachers individual and collective practice

Teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge and a clear passion for their disciplines. They effectively linked new content with prior knowledge and used real-world examples to make learning relevant and engaging for the students. In general, teachers had prepared an impressive range of resources and in the best lessons, these resources varied the demands on students and pacing was sensitive to student needs.

Activities at the beginning of lessons were used to check students' current understanding and identify any misconceptions. Learning intentions were routinely shared with students at the outset of lessons and revisited at the end, facilitating student self-assessment. These were most effective when they were written in student-friendly language, framed around student learning rather than lesson content, and when their meaning was discussed to ensure a common understanding of the purpose of the lesson.

Questioning was a key assessment strategy utilised during lessons. In many lessons, global questioning was used. This approach was limiting, as it generally assessed students' ability to recall facts only and responses to these questions were provided by a small number of students. In lessons where questions were targeted and differentiated, with adequate wait time provided, all students were supported to think critically and articulate complex ideas. In addition, some very good questioning of individual students, coupled with constructive, formative, oral feedback was observed as teachers circulated within the classrooms. This very good practice could be more widely shared by teachers and incorporated into everyday classroom practice.

Teachers engaged regularly in professional learning opportunities and they frequently shared their expertise at staff meetings. This good practice could be further developed across the school through the introduction of peer observation, where teachers could visit each other's lessons to observe colleagues, garner new ideas, and further enhance the collaborative culture that was evident in the school. This sharing of ideas could also be promoted by reflecting on teaching, learning and assessment at subject department meetings.

Substantial work had been done on many subject department plans. The most effective plans had school-designed units of learning linked to meaningful tasks that enabled both teachers and students to assess student learning. However, some plans were linked to chapters within textbooks rather than to the subject specifications, and included a generic list of formative assessment techniques. To improve these plans, the teachers should collaborate to identify the key learning to be achieved and to design specific assessment tasks aligned to that key learning.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

The overall quality of leadership and management was very good, ensuring the smooth running of the school while strategically planning for future developments and school improvement.

Leading learning and teaching

The school offered a broad, balanced curriculum where students had a wide variety of subjects to choose from. In order to respond to students' needs and interests and to offer as broad an education as possible, the school had recently introduced Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE), and was due to introduce Climate Action and Sustainable Development in September 2025. As part of an audit of its TY programme in line with the *NCCA Transition Year Programme Statement* (2024), teachers had been surveyed to determine their potential capacity to deliver new TY-specific and elective modules. All transition-year students spoken to during the evaluation praised the vast array of experiences available to them and the proposed move to student e-portfolios should enable them to fully capture the breadth of these experiences and associated learning.

It was positive to note that there was a core team of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) teachers, who had received training in suitable pedagogies for the subject. At the time of the evaluation, the school did not meet the minimum timetabling requirements for the Civic,

Social, and Political Education (CSPE) and SPHE short courses as outlined in Circular 0028/2023. However, this had been addressed and is rectified for the 2025-2026 school year.

Special educational needs (SEN) provision was well co-ordinated and was supported by weekly meetings of the core SEN team and the care team. A commendable feature of this provision was the fluid nature of the support provided, enabling students to avail of short-term interventions, where necessary, for social and emotional support as well as for learning support. Students benefited from early identification of needs as a result of the school's close links with the feeder primary schools, and consultation with parents and students. There was clear evidence that those on the SEN team were committed to inclusive education, and many had engaged in SEN-related professional learning, including training in evidence-based, autism-specific interventions. At the time of the evaluation, the school was involved in a provision mapping pilot project which involved identifying and evaluating the supports provided to all students within mainstream lessons. This reflective, proactive approach is very positive.

As part of its DEIS plan, the school had identified actions to improve student attendance and attainment and it was also exploring how best to provide sufficient challenge for very able students. The home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator was working to monitor and improve attendance levels. New software had been introduced to support staff, students and parents to monitor attainment and students were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning through a process of goal setting and reflection. In order to better support students throughout this process, teachers were being trained as mentors through the Check and Connect programme, an evidence-based structured mentoring programme that aims to promote student engagement.

To support student attainment, the school's teaching and learning committee had run a 'no pen day' and were in the process of monitoring its impact. Students in the focus groups described the day as fun, and mentioned that they had opportunities to engage in conversations about learning. Furthermore, since they did not need to concentrate on taking notes during lessons, they became more active participants in their learning. While the students mentioned that the teaching methodologies from that day were still being used in some lessons, there is potential to include these pedagogies more often as a way of improving student attendance and attainment. Many staff members had significant expertise in the use of active methodologies and this could be shared at staff meetings or via peer observation.

Teachers' attendance at professional learning events was facilitated and supported by management. This support was reflected in the results of the staff surveys conducted during the evaluation, where almost all teachers indicated that they were encouraged to avail of professional learning opportunities. The school also participated in communities of practice within the ETB, engaged in the Droichead professional induction framework, and generously provided placements for students participating in initial teacher education programmes.

Managing the organisation

The board of management was properly constituted and met regularly, while its members provided a valuable, committed service to the school. During discussions with the board it was very evident that the students and their welfare were at the heart of all decisions made.

A wide range of policies had been developed and implemented. The recent formation of a policy review committee will support the board in its endeavours to ensure that policies are reviewed in a structured and timely manner. One policy of note was the school's code of behaviour, which was based on the dignity in the workplace charter and the associated rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community. This very positive document promoted *a high level of courtesy and consideration for others*, and this was evident in all interactions observed. All stakeholders were consulted during the development and review of policies, the most recent of which was the review of the uniform policy, which had been instigated by the student council.

The board had done considerable work to promote the school and raise its profile within the local area. As a result, there had been a marked increase in enrolment in the previous ten years. In response to this, the board had worked to gain approval for an extension to the existing buildings.

Communication systems and processes were highly effective. In line with societal trends, the school had embraced the use of social media as a communications tool, in combination with methods such as its comprehensive website, emails and text messages.

The school was very ably led by the senior leadership team. While distinct roles and responsibilities had been agreed, it was clear that a team approach to management and leadership had been adopted. The team worked in a collegial, collaborative manner in partnership with all stakeholders. They demonstrated a deep commitment to the school community and employed their complementary skills to ensure the smooth running of the school, while strategically planning for future developments and school improvement. This was evident in the responses to the surveys carried out during the evaluation, where all teachers and almost all parents indicated that they felt the school was well run.

Leading school development

The guiding vision for the school was grounded in the core Education and Training Board (ETB) values, particularly care, community, and respect, with excellence in education forming the basis of the school's improvement goals. To support achievement of these goals, the school had done considerable work on the current DEIS plan, which focused on improving attendance and attainment. However, while the school had identified actions to achieve its goals, these actions were generally focused outside the classroom. The school should now identify a whole-school teaching and learning focus that will support them to improve student attendance and attainment. This focus may include whole-school actions related to: developing student voice in lessons; designing tasks that promote student engagement; using questioning techniques that afford all students the opportunity to respond, and other such strategies that underpin student wellbeing and will fundamentally support student attendance and attainment.

The board had invested considerably in the development of digital infrastructure in the school. Digital devices had been provided to teachers and all classrooms had wireless connections to data projectors. Considerable progress had been made in upskilling teachers in the use of digital technology to support their teaching and to share teaching resources.

The school had forged very positive relationships with the local community and the feeder primary schools. Senior leaders and members of the SEN team regularly visited these schools, transition-year students coached some of the primary school pupils in basketball, and local schools were invited to attend the matinee shows of the annual school musical. LCA students regularly visited the local further education and training colleges to become acquainted with potential avenues of further study upon leaving school. Third-year and transition-year students were very involved in improving the local area through litter-picking and wildflower-planting initiatives. The school also had strong links with parents. The parents' association was very active and all parents were regularly surveyed to gather their views on various aspects of the school.

Developing leadership capacity

The school embraced distributed leadership and ensured that appropriate training was provided to enable post holders to assume their leadership roles. The middle management teams were dynamic and were not only involved in the day-to-day running of the school, but were encouraged to contribute to and lead developmental planning. All teachers were involved in various teams linked to DEIS planning, and while a vision for these teams was agreed with senior leadership, the teams had autonomy to determine how that vision might best be achieved. Teachers interviewed during the evaluation indicated that they felt empowered to lead initiatives and mentioned that whenever they approached senior management with a proposal, they were given the opportunity to explore and develop it.

Teachers' opinions and views were regularly sought by senior management. Commendably, the principal met with all teachers individually each year to gather their views on how to promote school improvement and to determine any related professional development needs. These discussions were guided by a reflective document completed by teachers in advance of the meeting. The school also carried out regular post reviews based on the changing needs of the school and priorities identified by the teachers.

The opportunities for student leadership in the school were very good. Those involved in the students' council presented to the board twice yearly and had been involved in changes to the

canteen menu and to the school uniform. Students also had leadership opportunities in their roles as sports coaches and through committees such as the green schools committee and the active flag committee. The school was beginning a formal mentoring system for first-year students, to be introduced in September 2025. It was planned that the transition-year students involved would engage in formal leadership training to equip them to carry out this role effectively.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

The quality of support for students' wellbeing was very good and was a key feature of the school's culture.

The school created a nurturing, inclusive environment, with processes and procedures in place to minimise school-based wellbeing risk factors such as absenteeism and disengagement. A very high level of care and the warm atmosphere in the school were mentioned by all members of the school community in their engagements with inspectors. This sense of warmth played a significant role in strengthening the wellbeing protective factors by fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness, while promoting respectful behaviour and positive interpersonal relationships. Staff wellbeing was also highly valued in the school and was supported through initiatives organised by the wellbeing committee.

Transition of students into the school was very well organised. It included information sessions for parents and a treasure hunt for the students. Of particular note was a meeting held with each incoming first-year student and their parents to get to know the students, and to discuss their needs and interests. Parents who met with the inspectors were particularly complimentary of this meeting, as they felt that school leaders were genuinely interested in getting to know their child. Continued connections with parents were supported through the work of the HSCL co-ordinator, the open-door policy that existed in the school, and the provision of mathematics lessons for parents to enable them to support their young people with their homework. The guidance counsellors actively supported students at all points of transition. Examples of some supports provided were an annual careers fair, subject sampling, and presentations by teachers and students to enable informed subject choices.

Students' social development was supported by a restorative practice module taught to first-year students, while the behaviour for learning teacher created short-term, bespoke interventions for individual students who required behavioural support. The introduction of a token system and the sending of postcards home to celebrate acts of kindness and good behaviour highlighted the importance the school attached to respectful relationships.

The school offered a diverse range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, some of which were sustained through the generosity of spirit within the staff. In the student survey, almost all students indicated that they had the opportunity to take part in any school activity in which they were interested. One of the main events of the school year was the annual school musical, which involved the entire school community. All those who met the inspectors spoke very highly of this experience, as it reinforced the sense of community in the school and allowed students and teachers to connect outside the classroom. All transition-year students were involved in the musical and they praised it as the highlight of their year.

Comprehensive pastoral care structures also supported students' sense of wellbeing, as reflected in the whole-school guidance plan and in the areas identified for development within the DEIS plan. Teaching for wellbeing was also evident in lessons where student voice was promoted and where all students had the opportunity to engage in classroom discussions.

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