



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Portmarnock Community School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Carrickhill Road Portmarnock Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	91324P
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	16/05/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	17/09/2024

What is a whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning?

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

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

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, 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	<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>Child Protection Procedures for Primary 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

Date of inspection	16/05/2024
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with Board of Management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Portmarnock Community School is a co-educational post-primary school under the patronage of the Loreto Education Trust, the Archbishop of Dublin and the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board with a current enrolment of 961 students. The following programmes are offered in the school: the Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LP), Junior Cycle, Transition Year (optional) and the established Leaving Certificate. A recent addition to the school has been the class for learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and a second ASD class will be in place at the beginning of the next school year. The school is in the final stages of planning for a new school building and part of the school is currently in temporary accommodation.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The board of management demonstrated a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the school and members were very supportive of the school's senior management team.
- The senior management team (SMT), some new to their roles, demonstrated a strong commitment to the holistic development of every learner including the promotion of learner self-confidence and attainment.
- Highly effective lessons were characterised by purposeful, active, and collaborative learning and a very good balance between teacher instruction and student participation.
- Collaborative work was most effective where students were provided with adequate time to consider, justify and share their learning with each other in small, structured groups and with the wider class.
- Highly effective questioning was observed where there was a good mix of higher and lower-order questioning and where the questions increased in complexity as learning progressed, in line with the school's identified self-evaluation (SSE) priority.
- There was a high level of commitment to the promotion of wellbeing in the school; a wide extra-curricular programme helped to develop a sense of community in the school and students had many opportunities to get involved in projects and take on leadership roles.

Recommendations

- Subject departments should review their practices in relation to differentiation to ensure that all learners are challenged and experience success in their learning; a formal system for tracking student attainment should be progressed and implemented.
- A review of how best formative feedback can be provided to learners, including how students can be best supported in making use of the feedback provided is recommended
- A more consistent approach to subject and programme planning is recommended; including timeframes, key learning, methodologies and modes of assessment.
- The curriculum advisory group should conduct an audit of curriculum provision, ensuring alignment with the school's growing needs: this should include a thorough review of the timetable including timetabling for additional educational needs (AEN).

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning was good overall. The quality of practice in individual lessons varied and ranged from very good to lessons which required improvement. Some of the very good lessons included aspects of excellent practices. Overall, the key areas for improvement included further development of differentiated teaching approaches and more use of formative assessment to support teaching and learning.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In almost all lessons, teachers shared the learning intentions very effectively with the learners at the beginning of lessons. In highly effective lessons, the learning intentions chosen actively built on students' prior learning and experiences. There was an appropriate balance between knowledge development and skill development. In the most successful lessons, learning intentions were phrased using student-friendly language, in terms of what learners should be able to do or know by the end of the lesson. It was noteworthy that this approach aligned with the Behaviour for Learning initiative, which was being piloted in the school during the evaluation. As this initiative advances, it will progress the whole-school focus on the use of learning intentions.

Very positive learning environments were observed and were cultivated through teachers' affirmation of students' efforts. Teachers regularly praised and affirmed students' inputs and this contributed to the positive learning environments observed. Students' participation and enjoyment were clearly evident in the lessons where a variety of methodologies was used to engage all learners. Such methodologies included the use of digital technologies, assessment for learning approaches, images and physical models.

Overall, teachers planned well for their lessons in a manner that supported incremental learning and built on students' prior knowledge. In the most effective lessons,, well-designed resources were utilised to link content to learner experiences outside of the classroom. In a few of the very good lessons, aspects of excellent practice were observed where the use of thresources provided for meaningful differentiation. In the highly effective lessons, well-differentiated resources were used. Such resources were designed both to challenge and stretch learners to achieve to their highest potential, enabling all learners to access the lesson content and achieve success. However, there were instances where the same content was delivered in the same way to all students. Subject departments should review their practices in relation to differentiation to ensure that all learners are hchallenged and experience success in their learning.

Highly effective lessons were characterised by purposeful, active, and collaborative learning and a very good balance between teacher instruction and student participation. Collaborative work was most effective where students were provided with adequate time to consider, justify and share their learning with each other in small, structured groups and with the wider class. This practice should be more widespread.

Teachers individual and collective practice

Highly effective questioning was observed where there was a good mix of higher and lower-order questioning and where the questions increased in complexity as learning progressed. Best practice was observed where students were challenged to think for themselves, where teachers expected students to expand on their answers and appropriate wait time was provided. In some lessons, teachers provided the answers or processed the answers too quickly and students did not have ample opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. In line with the school's SSE priority of questioning for inclusion, this is an opportune time for the SSE team to review the implementation of this target to ensure its effectiveness.

In the lessons observed, teachers provided some very good oral feedback on students' work. There was some evidence of very good monitoring and formative feedback in samples of work reviewed. However, the quality of formative feedback varied and was an area for further development. Subject departments should review their assessment practices for consistency and discuss how best formative feedback can be provided to learners. Strategies should also include how students can best be supported in making use of the feedback provided. Students were observed to adopt a range of practices for the organisation and recording of their work and teachers should encourage students to adopt good organisational practice in their record keeping.

Subject department meetings were held and minuted. Meeting agendas indicated that teachers, in the main, discussed organisational matters. Best practice was noted where teaching and learning was a regular item on the agenda and discussions included ideas relating to practice and pedagogy. Of the sample of subject department plans reviewed during the evaluation, the quality of planning varied. The most successful plans had clear learning outcomes that were linked to learning activities and resources. In a small number of plans, best practice was observed where the key learning was linked to the appropriate wellbeing indicators and contained teacher reflections. Subject departments should review their plans to ensure they contain indicators of highly effective practice. This review should lead to working documents, which are regularly edited and updated.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

The overall quality of school leadership and management was very good; however, key areas requiring improvement were identified.

Leading learning and teaching

There have been changes to the senior management team (SMT) over the past few years and some members were new to their roles. The team demonstrated a strong commitment to the holistic development of every learner including the promotion of learner self-confidence and attainment. The SMT shared a strong vision for the development of the school. They were well supported by a middle management team whose roles and responsibilities had been refined and aligned to meet the needs of the school. Post-holders led the teaching and learning team and the digital learning team who had identified specific targets to improve teaching and learning through surveys of staff, parents and learners.

A behaviour for learning group, established in the current school year, were in the process of piloting a programme to support students' attitudes to learning. It was good that these initiatives were linked to the overall SSE plan for the school. The senior management team set high expectations for students and were exploring how the school could use its attainment data more systematically to assist students to reach their full potential. A formal system for tracking student attainment that involves input from year heads, subject teams and students should be progressed and implemented.

The school's assessment policy was in draft form. The format and frequency of assessments had been reviewed over the past few years and the SMT and teachers recognised the need to review the current system of in-house assessments, given that the State Examination Commission's adjustments to Curriculum Based Assessments (CBAs) will be discontinued. The assessment policy was due to be ratified by the Board at its next meeting.

Commendable efforts were made to ensure that the curriculum met students' evolving needs and interests and a curriculum advisory group was in place. A very broad range of subjects was offered and new subjects, such as Leaving Certificate Physical Education, and Politics and Society, have been introduced. The school recently added a classroom for learners with autism spectrum disorder and a second special class will be introduced at the start of the next school year. The Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP) was introduced at Junior Cycle and the feasibility of introducing the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme was under exploration at the time of the evaluation. This is an opportune time for the curriculum advisory group to conduct an audit of curriculum provision, ensuring alignment with the school's growing needs; this should include a thorough review of the timetable including timetabling for students with additional educational needs (AEN). Circulars 28/2023, 72/2022, 43/2018, and 14/2017 will provide helpful guidance in this regard.

It was noteworthy that in the Transition Year (TY) Programme, subjects were included due to student feedback. The TY programme was reviewed annually and contained a very good balance of subjects, skills and activities. Planning for teaching and learning in some of the TY subjects required further development.

The ASD classroom was a recent addition to the school. It was a bright and spacious room with an adjacent sensory room. A second ASD classroom is planned to be opened in the next school year. A core team of specialist staff led the provision of supports for students and meetings were held regularly. At staff meetings and periodically throughout the school year, the AEN co-ordinator provided teachers with information regarding strategies and suitable targets for students with AEN. Supports on a one-to-one and small group basis were also organised as well as some team teaching, co-ordination of the AEN team and the SNAs.

During the majority of timetabled Irish lessons, an additional class was provided for learners who have exemptions from the study of Irish. The needs and supports required by this group varied. The provision plan for these groups needs review to ensure their specific individual needs are addressed and targeted.

The deployment of some teaching hours needed review. At the time of the evaluation, a number of hours allocated by the Department for supporting students with special educational needs (SEN) was unused and a teacher vacancy existed. The school had re-advertised for teachers to address this shortfall in the SEN allocation. School management should work with the patron bodies in order to urgently address this shortfall in provision for SEN.

Managing the organisation

The trustees, management and staff of the school saw the school as an integral and valued part of the growing community of Portmarnock. This was evidenced in the links with local businesses for work experience, the local primary and post-primary schools and the broad array of courses available through the school's evening programme. The school was in the final stages of planning for a new building. The current facilities were very clean and were managed very well. A health and safety audit had been carried out, which contained risk assessments for practical classrooms as well as the newly-added classroom for learners with autism spectrum disorder.

The board of management demonstrated a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the school and members were very supportive of the school's senior management team. There was a high level of awareness among board members of their role and it was noteworthy that the admissions policy was recently reviewed and included procedures for admission to the ASD class as well as to curricular programmes. The school's anti-bullying policy, child protection policy and code of behaviour had been recently updated. A number of other policies needed updating or ratification. These policies should be progressed to ratification by the board. There is scope for the board to reflect on their achievements over their tenure and compile an action plan for the incoming board. This action plan should include a schedule of policy review.

Portmarnock Community School has experienced considerable changes of staff. The principal, recently appointed, demonstrated a high level of commitment to the school. The senior management team worked very well together and their leadership roles were well distributed. Communication systems in the school were very good. Regular staff meetings were held and teachers had opportunities to meet in teams and in subject departments. Meetings of the middle management team were held during the year; there was scope, however, to timetable these meetings to allow them to be held more regularly and to enable all relevant teachers to attend. The school's digital platform was used very effectively in the management of information and in the sharing of data. The majority of teachers and parents who responded to the questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation indicated that communication systems in the school were very effective.

Leading school development

A strong culture of reflective practice was apparent in the many meetings and discussions held with inspectors during the evaluation. The school had very good capacity for development and improvement and this was led well by the SMT. There was evidence that teachers were willing to reflect, share and develop their practice. The school self-evaluation (SSE) process was used very effectively to identify target areas through surveys of teachers, learners and parents as well as some focus groups. The school improvement plan was a comprehensive oversight document with three priorities identified for the next three years. During discussions in the course of the evaluation, it was reported by some staff and senior management that more time with the implementation and refinement of the current action was needed. This is recommended.

Teachers were facilitated to attend a host of individual continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and whole-school CPD was provided recently on restorative practice, which was organised by the Restorative Practice team in the school. As Portmarnock Community School has an increasing number of new staff and given the planned changes to curriculum provision, this is now an opportune time for the school to carry out an audit of staff CPD needs.

Developing leadership capacity

The senior management team was clearly committed to ensuring that the leadership and management structures in the school continued to evolve to meet the needs of the school. It was highly commendable that staff were afforded opportunities to lead working groups in key areas of the school. There was a strong commitment among school management to building a teaching team of specialist staff. Staff numbers had grown rapidly and a targeted approach was taken to recruiting staff with the appropriate qualifications to provide the school's broad curriculum; in the main, this has been achieved.

A comprehensive induction programme was in place for new teachers at the start of the school year and the teachers' handbook for new staff was recently revised. The Droichead Programme was overseen by a post holder and the majority of staff were keen to engage with the Droichead programme each year. How the learning from the programme can be shared across all staff is currently being explored by the school.

A detailed needs' analysis informed the current schedule of posts. The senior management team had worked very closely with post holders throughout the school year to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the school.

A broad range of initiatives were in place to promote and support student leadership, such as the Student Council, senior leadership programme, prefects, the ambassador programme, the green schools' committee and the 'learning to learn' study skills programme for first-year students.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

Curricular provision for wellbeing was in line with the recommended 400 hour allocation for Junior Cycle. The school's taught wellbeing programme comprised three curricular areas: short courses in Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education

(CSPE) as well as junior cycle Physical Education (PE). SPHE and PE were provided at Senior Cycle. A comprehensive array of well-selected activities were included in the Appendix I section of the plan for wellbeing. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was provided in SPHE at Junior Cycle by teachers who had availed of CPD and it was good to note that the school's plans to extend this training to a wider cohort of teachers in the next school year. Senior cycle RSE was taught as a designated six-week module. Policies for RSE and SPHE were in place. Aspects of the planning for the RSE, CSPE and SPHE programmes required further detail with respect to methodologies and modes of assessment. The timing of delivery of RSE should also be reviewed.

The school had a wellbeing team and the wellbeing plan was currently being reviewed. The questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation should be reviewed and included as part of the review of the school's whole-school wellbeing plan.

There was a high-level of commitment to the promotion of wellbeing in the school. It was noteworthy that the year head and form tutor system facilitated a culture where students can feel a sense of belonging. Activities such as assemblies, year-group trips and a wide extra-curricular programme helped to develop a sense of community in the school. Students had many opportunities to get involved in projects and take on leadership roles. However, questionnaire data also indicated that there was scope to review the consistency of implementation of policies, such as the code of behaviour and the provision of information regarding RSE.

Care team meetings provided a forum to discuss the needs of individual students and very good referral systems were in place. The school's Chaplain was involved in the care and wellbeing of students in the school. The Chaplain, who is a member of the care team, also provided one-to-one counselling meetings for students.

Very effective procedures were in place to support the transition of students from the feeder primary schools into first year. Senior students availed of one-to-one guidance and counselling opportunities and guidance classes were timetabled, while guidance was provided during borrowed classes in third year of junior cycle.

The school had a well-stocked library which was bright, well maintained and benefitted from the services of a part-time librarian. It was well-used by students and teachers, particularly those involved in the accelerated reading programme, and hosted some of the lunchtime clubs such as the chess club. Good displays of teacher and student book-reviews were on the walls of the library. Overall, this was further evidence of the high commitment to the promotion of wellbeing in the school.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Portmarnock Community School wishes to express our appreciation for the recognition of the many strengths of the work by all stakeholders at Portmarnock Community School that is contained within the main findings of the WSE MLL Inspection Report. The Board of Management, and all stakeholders at the school also welcome and value the recommendations contained in the Report. These will continue to inform and to focus the school's ongoing programme of self-evaluation, planning and improvement.

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

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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