



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Glenstal Abbey School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Murroe Co Limerick
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	64150F
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	11/02/2026
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	03/09/2026

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.

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.

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.

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>Bí Cineálta</i>
1. The name of the DLP and the child safeguarding statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS. 2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment. 3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern. 4. The school's child safeguarding statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2023 or the updated procedures 2025. 5. The minutes of the last three board of management meetings contain a child	1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of Bí Cineálta, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it. 2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and pupils/students. 3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of Bí Cineálta. 4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment. 5. All staff visited report that they have read the school's Bí Cineálta policy and that

protection oversight report in line with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2023 or the updated procedures 2025. 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 2023 or the updated procedures 2025. 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	they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and addressing bullying behaviour.
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the boarding facilities' child protection procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the boarding facility. 2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the management authority and includes an annual review and risk assessment. 3. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).	4. The records of the last three management authority meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the <i>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023)</i>. 5. The management authority has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all boarding facility personnel on the <i>Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures for Boarding Facilities associated with Recognised Schools 2023</i>. 6. Child Protection Records are maintained in a secure location.

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

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Dates of inspection	05/02/2026, 09/02/2026 & 11/02/2026
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • 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 • Review of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Glenstal Abbey School is an all-boys fee-charging post-primary school, which is under the patronage of the Benedictine Monks of Glenstal Abbey. The school offered the Junior Cycle, a Transition Year (TY) programme which was obligatory, the Leaving Certificate (Established) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). At the time of the evaluation, there were 204 students enrolled. These students comprised seven-day boarders, five-day boarders and day boarders. A number of the seven-day boarders were international students who enrolled for a single year and included students for whom English was not their first language.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good overall: students were enthusiastic about progressing in their learning and motivated to excel academically, while teachers created purposeful environments, communicating high expectations for achievement.
- Learner outcomes and experiences were highly commended in most lessons: learning experiences were especially worthwhile when teachers' astute management of their own input optimised student engagement and when task design ensured the outcomes of their participation were clearly evident to students.
- Across most lessons, there remained scope to enhance those aspects of learners' experiences which would allow for more student collaboration and student autonomy.
- The quality of leadership and management was very good overall: ongoing balanced attention to traditional values and contemporary realities guided decision-making at all levels, with students' best interests always at the core.
- Very effective leadership and management had led to identifiable improvement across a range of areas.
- The quality of supports for students' wellbeing was very good overall: an ethos of accepting every element within the person was lived out in all types of everyday actions and interactions.

Recommendations

- To reduce students' dependence on their teachers when making decisions about next steps in their learning, it is recommended that all teachers create structured opportunities for students to work collaboratively during lessons.
- In order that students can further develop their capacity to critically consider the quality of their own learning and feel capable of providing feedback to one another, all teachers should incorporate formative assessment strategies into their lessons.
- Hours from the special education teaching allocation which are used for associated planning should be made available to those members of the special educational needs (SEN) team who are delivering targeted supports.
- To encourage greater parental inclusion in decision-making, school management should move beyond existing ways of facilitating parental involvement and develop a more participatory approach to parental engagement.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good overall.

Learner Outcomes and Experiences

Learner outcomes and experiences were highly commended in most of the lessons.

Classrooms were productive and affirming spaces, in which self-motivated students listened attentively and applied themselves diligently to assigned activities. Where necessary, all students focused on tasks and persevered through challenges. Many students were enthusiastic about progressing in their learning and motivated to excel academically. Beyond the examples of very good outcomes in lessons, students' achievement in certificate examinations had them well positioned to pursue their choice of pathway following their post-primary education.

Students' capacity to undertake more challenging tasks, or to understand more complex material, was best when lesson sequencing allowed for layers of complexity to be added progressively. Students also responded constructively when given a degree of choice around the type of task they could complete. Given students' high level of intrinsic motivation generally, on occasion there would have been merit in introducing more choice, especially in homework assignments.

As teachers monitored task completion they often commended both students' efforts and the outcomes of their work. This praise was most meaningful when successful features, which had been explained to students in advance, were noted by the teacher. Had more students been guided by clear success criteria, they could have had more opportunities to consider the quality of their work independently of their teachers. This would further develop their capacity for managing their own learning and for problem-solving, and would also give teachers scope to provide differentiated support to individual students or groups of students.

When engaging in lesson activities, students' confidence levels were often such that they willingly sought help from their teachers when unsure. While less prevalent, they also sought help from one another or completed tasks collaboratively, especially when encouraged to do so. Students would have benefitted from more deliberate incorporation of collaborative activities in many of their lessons: it would have helped develop their subject-specific oracy, including appropriate use of key words, and participation in these shared sense-making processes would have supported understanding.

In one case where structured collaborative tasks were used very effectively, students were clearly accustomed to being dependent on their peers to complete tasks and progress in their learning. While in a small number of other cases, students worked very well together, largely

speaking, opportunities for students to work collaboratively and more independently of their teacher were not availed of. Given how positively students rate the experience of supporting one another with homework assignments, the practice of setting collaborative assignments as homework should also be afforded consideration.

Learning was best elicited in those lessons in which students connected new information with prior learning or existing knowledge, or when they built on existing skills. This was done most effectively when they made meaningful links with real-life experiences, or drew on areas of personal interest, to guide their learning. In one lesson, a case-study approach brought the reality of the learning area to life while in another lesson, students demonstrated creativity in how they each chose to visually represent a familiar scene. In some other lessons, the opportunity to draw on their own lived experiences helped students to make sense of key concepts.

Teachers' Individual and collective practice

Teachers' individual and collective practice was of a high quality overall. Preparation for all lessons was thorough and teachers' subject knowledge was strong.

Teachers shared learning intentions with the class at the beginning of most lessons. When used very effectively, time was taken to communicate the learning intentions clearly, using student-friendly language and suitable action verbs to highlight the desired learning. In one lesson, the teacher's referencing of relevant learning intentions at various lesson phases was a useful way of signalling progress to learners. More effective use of learning intentions broadly, as well as the use of learning intentions to increase student ownership of their learning, was identified as an area worthy of development.

Teacher delivery was often supplemented with attractive visual resources and carefully prepared worksheets. Explanations were clear and appropriate dispersal of questions prompted students to remain attentive. Many students engaged constructively with this teaching approach, interjecting with observations and queries. In almost all cases, contributions were welcomed by teachers and often used as a springboard for developing thoughts or introducing new ideas. Not all students had the capacity to sustain their attention for the entire duration of these lessons, however, and the incorporation of more active learning strategies to increase student voice was advised. Some minor modifications to questioning strategies and to task design would enable students to share experiences with the class, give demonstrations, provide explanations, undertake brief research tasks and exchange ideas or information with one another.

Where approaches were student-centred, students demonstrated curiosity, were comfortable taking risks and learned from mistakes. They listened actively to one another, often building on the contributions of their peers and appeared to be progressing at a pace that was in keeping with their ability level. Differentiation was most effective in these lessons: it included the use of prompts to elicit a response, the provision of extension activities as well as opportunities to revisit a challenging learning area to ensure understanding. It was also present in the choices given to some students around their preferred tasks or preferred approaches to task completion.

The most common forms of assessment during almost all lessons were teacher questioning and circulation. Feedback from teachers was most effective when it was clearly linked with instructions given in advance of undertaking the task and when students were making adjustments to their work accordingly. Some teachers paid close attention to patterns across student responses and used these observations to provide all students with clear guidance for improvement. Broadly speaking, formative assessment was an aspect of teachers' practice that could be developed and there would be merit in using the school self-evaluation (SSE) process to implement consistent and dependable approaches in this area. A review of the assessment policy could prove a useful starting point for a whole-school exploration of best practice.

Approaches to subject development planning varied. Some plans were immensely detailed but the espoused practices were not always evident in lessons; the reverse also applied. There had been considerable investment in the SSE process to seek a more balanced distribution of homework assignments for students across the school week. Learning from this exercise will assist with a deeper exploration of homework more broadly in a further SSE cycle and through a review of the assessment policy. The reported current practice of subject departmental meetings incorporating 'Teaching Together' opportunities could also be expanded to facilitate

the sharing of successful practice and the exchange of knowledge and experience across subjects.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management was very good overall

Leading learning and teaching

Leadership of learning and teaching encompassed a clear focus on achieving the best possible outcomes and experiences for students. This was best evidenced by the school's ongoing and highly effective evaluative processes which aimed to be proactive and responsive to evolving needs across the student population and to potentially challenging contextual constraints.

A key strength was the broad and balanced range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities. This was strongly reflective of the school's ethos and of the values it espoused. Additionally, curricular provision was informed by student preferences and was under constant review to ensure the optimum provision of subject options alongside an openness to expand the curriculum further as resources permitted.

A well-considered TY Programme had been developed and included the desirable provision for the core subjects, interesting TY modules, stand-alone events and trips. Teachers had been creative and innovative, drawing on their own interests and expertise, to design stimulating learning experiences. Commendably, year-long subject sampling was also in place. Notably, the transition to an online digital portfolio helped students showcase their skills, experiences and learning over the course of the programme.

Worthwhile developments in digital technologies were evident with a sub-committee endeavouring to drive positive advancements through proactive planning which sought to develop a practical strategy for the creative use of AI. While this is prudent, more exigent opportunities exist for the reintroduction of digital literacy for first year students, as noted by the committee themselves, and the appropriate use of digital tools within the classroom, something that was not widely observed in lessons. A further positive development was the digital drop-in clinics to support colleagues in their practice

Teachers had actively availed of a large range of professional development opportunities with upskilling and training evident in the areas of leadership, management and school development, teaching and learning, student support and digital technology. This spoke not just of their commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for their students but also, as supported by the teacher surveys, of management's readiness to encourage and facilitate individual teachers' professional growth.

Managing the organisation

The board of management was appropriately constituted and members brought a very worthwhile range of experiences and skills to their roles. While espousing the traditional Benedictine ethos, the board was also progressive and wished to remain agile to emerging needs.

There was a structured approach to convening regularly held meetings, which were well attended. There was a policy register, with policy review and updates a set agenda item. Teachers had presented to the board, as had students. Such opportunities served to foster an inclusive school culture. To more widely disseminate the good work evident to date, and to further strengthen the communication and transparency between stakeholders, it is advised that the board share an agreed report with the school community.

The senior management team had clearly delineated roles and demonstrated a very proactive working relationship. Their complementarity of strengths and reflective practice ensured that the school was constantly improving for the better. Solution-focused and modelling a constructive attitude, the senior management team managed complexity, challenge and change very effectively.

Key management and leadership roles had been devolved to five assistant principals and related outcomes indicated an underlying spirit of collaboration, co-operation and community. This spirit was borne out in the willingness of a number of teachers to assume leadership roles independent of the formal post structure. Assistant principals contributed very effectively to the day-to-day management of the school, especially but not exclusively, in the area of student support.

Communication systems and processes were highly effective, and the school communicated very successfully both internally and externally, and with all stakeholders. The recently devised staff handbook was a welcome addition as this provided clarity regarding timetabling, school business and leadership responsibilities. There was scope to enhance communication between the senior leadership team and teachers as individuals, by scheduling formal annual meetings to provide a space for collaborative review of performance and to explore possible avenues for growth.

Students spoke of the value of the school's communication channels. An elected student council acted as a mechanism for students to advocate for the entire student population. However, there was scope to leverage the student council further and to amplify student voice, through more consistent inclusion of students in reviewing school policies, for instance.

Leading school development

Supported by the board of management, a number of long-awaited, yet pressing, changes were made to the operation of the school under the astute stewardship of the senior leadership team. Making judicious use of their distinctive but complementary communication styles and problem-solving capabilities, they led a process of whole-school reflection in which staff explored how provision could be enhanced whilst preserving the school's unique characteristic spirit. Within a relatively short timeframe, significant changes, which had a largely positive impact, were implemented. By minimising uncertainty where possible, senior leadership provided a working environment in which staff members felt empowered to identify areas of provision that they would like to see enhanced and to take responsibility for introducing positive and meaningful change.

The use of SSE as a mechanism for planning and implementing change had become more embedded. Staff and students were accustomed to actions associated with different stages of the process and many improvement actions were the outcome of shared sense-making by a closely-knit school community.

Progress with regard to implementing recommendations arising from inspection reports varied. While steps had been taken to amend timetabling arrangements for Biology and to consolidate the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) team of teachers, recommendations connected with teaching and learning continued to feature as areas for improvement. Specifically, a recommendation that teacher input be reduced continued to apply across a majority of lessons. A feature of the learner experience which did not appear to have progressed beyond what was reported in previous inspections was that of creating opportunities for students to connect and learn collaboratively during lessons. Thus, the board of management should take steps to systematically monitor how actions arising from recommendations are being progressed.

Developing leadership capacity

The senior leadership team collaborated constructively and professionally with the teaching staff. Minutes of staff meetings indicated that these meetings were an open forum in which teachers contributed openly to discussions. Notably, the sequencing of agenda items gave priority to the school's core business; that of optimising experiences and outcomes for the students.

Post holder responsibilities were the outcome of a staff-led review. They were aligned with the strengths of various individuals and also clearly supported the smooth day-to-day operation of the school. Distribution of responsibilities within the middle management team had been informed by a school-developed framework in which each leadership role was linked with the school's main development areas. Such judicious delegation also provided the senior leadership team with space to attend to their most pressing responsibilities and demands.

The principal and deputy principal actively honed their own professional skills and competences in different ways. Both actively participated in various professional networks. Their choice of networks ensured their ongoing exposure to new and diverse ways of thinking whilst also providing very worthwhile opportunities for reflection and support.

There were many positive examples of teachers, who were not necessarily post holders, being empowered to lead key areas of the school's work. The range of roles undertaken reflected the breadth of the school's development priorities and the diverse skills, competences and interests of the staff.

Many of the customs and practices fostered through boarding school life instilled in students a clear sense of responsibility to themselves and to the school's community. This was most evident in their capacity to manage themselves and their learning, and in the striking solidarity evident within and across year groups. In focus groups, convened as part of the evaluation, senior students spoke of the positive impact of students' collective wish to succeed in their learning. They spoke of how younger students witnessed this motivation and, in turn, subscribed to the same study ethic as they progressed through school.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

Supports for students' wellbeing were of a very high quality. Everyday actions, which were in harmony with the school's Benedictine ethos, fostered a culture which was visibly characterised by positive and fulfilling relationships between all members of its community. Such a school climate was highly conducive to building students' resilience, especially as they encountered routine age and stage-related pressures.

All staff were deeply cognisant that the school was a "home away from home" for its students. The intricacies of ensuring appropriate information-sharing within and beyond the school were dealt with very effectively. Core to the school's integrated approach to supporting its students was the expectation that all members of the school community treated themselves and one another with Reverence, Respect and Responsibility. Staff's capacity to live out these values in their engagement with students was being further developed through the delivery of training in restorative practice. The newly-created Wellbeing Room was a welcoming space in which students could relax, reset and recharge.

An impressive array of highly effective communication and support structures ensured clarity around individual and collective roles and responsibilities. Especially striking was the singular objective of the student support team. Their experience and expertise ensured the design and delivery of a whole host of protective measures which were seamlessly integrated into various aspects of provision. Their familiarity with various risk factors, especially those associated with boarding school life, was especially evident as was their capacity to develop, review and adapt individualised responses for issues ranging from academic to emotional.

Mindful of how students' families were dispersed geographically, the school calendar included a range of social events which brought families together. There would be merit in exploring ways in which these and other occasions, when parents are gathered together, could be used to build the general parent body's awareness of national policies, how such policies drive decision-making at school level and their likely impact on learner experiences and teacher practice.

Components of the school curriculum which sought to directly support students' wellbeing included weekly classes in SPHE, Religious Education (RE) and Physical Education (PE) for all students. Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) was taught to all junior cycle students who also had a weekly timetabled class with their tutor. Tutors followed a school-designed programme, the elements of which sought to address challenges which had been encountered by students in the past.

Guidance provision was a school-wide responsibility. Guidance-related learning was appropriately aligned with each student's stage in his educational journey. Counselling, a central component of Guidance provision, was viewed as an empowering intervention which built students' capacity to solve problems and develop coping strategies.

Work to support students through significant transitions was extensive. First-year induction was a combination of individualised and group inputs with a clear emphasis on communication and building shared understandings amongst students. Comprehensive supports were also provided by the Guidance department in advance of students selecting Leaving Certificate subjects.

Supports for students with SEN was delivered predominantly by way of small group withdrawal. Information in students' support plans included teachers' observations as well as feedback from the students themselves and from their subject teachers. For this support to have greater impact, the number of teachers from whom any one individual student receives support needs to be reduced. As per Department guidelines, it is the teachers who provide this support directly who should have responsibility for the development of the relevant support files and plans. Any hours from the allocation which are used for associated administration should be made available to these teachers. Thus, it is recommended that the number of staff members involved in the delivery of special education support be reduced to a small core team who have the requisite interest, experience and training in this area. Implementation of this recommendation should lead to better alignment between the nature of the supports provided and students' identified learning needs.

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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

Glenstal Abbey School warmly welcomes the findings of the Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning, which recognises the very high quality of leadership and management across the school. We are particularly encouraged by the acknowledgement that decision-making at all levels is guided by a careful balance of our Benedictine traditions and the evolving needs of contemporary education, always placing the best interests of students at the centre of decision making.

The report highlights the proactive and reflective leadership of the Principal and Deputy Principal, whose collaborative approach has led to significant and identifiable improvements across many aspects of school life in recent years. It also recognises the school's strong culture of communication, professional growth, innovation and shared responsibility. The evaluation further affirms the school's commitment to ongoing review, strategic planning and responsiveness to the evolving needs of its students and community. We are grateful to our staff, students, parents and wider school community for their contribution to this success. We welcome the recommendations contained in the report and remain committed to ongoing reflection, improvement and excellence in all areas of school life.

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

The school welcomes the recommendations contained in the Whole-School Evaluation report and has already begun planning for their implementation through existing school improvement structures.

To further develop students' independence in learning, collaborative learning strategies will become a key focus of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process and ongoing professional learning. Subject departments will be supported in incorporating structured opportunities for peer learning, discussion and collaborative problem-solving into lessons, enabling students to take greater ownership of their learning.

The school also recognises the value of formative assessment in helping students reflect on and improve their learning. A review of assessment practices will be undertaken, in the next academic year, through departmental collaboration and the sharing of effective practice across subjects. In relation to special educational needs provision, the school will review the deployment of special education teaching hours and associated planning arrangements. This review will seek to ensure that targeted supports are delivered by a smaller core team of teachers and that planning time is aligned with the recommendations of the report.

Existing communication structures will be built upon through consultation processes, information sessions and mechanisms that allow parents to contribute more actively to the ongoing development of the school.

The Board of Management and Senior Leadership Team will monitor progress on these actions as part of the school's continuous improvement agenda. The school remains committed to building on the tremendous strengths identified in the evaluation, while ensuring that all developments continue to support the highest quality educational experience for every student.

