

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

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| <b>Ainm na scoile /<br/>School name</b>       | St. Flannan's College |
| <b>Seoladh na scoile /<br/>School address</b> | Ennis<br>County Clare |
| <b>Uimhir rolla /<br/>Roll number</b>         | 61920N                |

**Date of Evaluation: 16-05-2019**



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An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **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. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

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

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

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 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

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

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

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| <b>Dates of inspection</b>  | 7, 8 and 9 May 2019   |
| Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with board of management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principals</li><li>• Meetings with key teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus-group interview</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul> |

### School context

Originally a diocesan college and boarding school dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, St. Flannan's is now a co-educational, voluntary secondary day school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. The enrolment in the 2018/2019 school year was 1173 students. As per the school's admissions policy, school management has capped the number of female entrants to one-third of the school population. The school provides a broad range of subjects. As well as Junior Cycle and the Leaving Certificate programmes, it offers Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) on an optional basis.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- There is a very strong sense of pride in the school's mission of educational provision in Ennis and of commitment to continuous improvement, particularly evident over the past two years.
- The quality of managing the organisation and of leading school development is good; aspects of the leadership of learning and teaching and of developing leadership capacity have scope for improvement.
- While students report that they get on well with each other and that they value the supports for curricular and extra-curricular learning provided to them, their views on how they experience school life have not been harnessed in school development to date.
- The overall quality of learning and teaching is good, including very good practice observed in some lessons; learner experience, differentiation and formative assessment practices are areas for development.
- Progress on management-related recommendations from previous evaluations is good, and overall progress on frequently recurring teaching and learning recommendations is satisfactory to date.
- The school is at an early stage of embedding the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and has strong capacity for ongoing improvement.

#### Recommendations

- Priorities for timetable construction need to be explicitly identified and agreed, removing unnecessary concurrency constraints, better supporting wellbeing provision, supporting inter-subject equity, and ultimately providing greater openness of subject choice to students.

- Student supports should be further developed by establishing a class tutor system, by expanding the first year induction programme, and by integrating key findings from periodic surveys and focus groups of students into future developments in this area.
- The board needs to engage in more focussed oversight of teaching and learning issues.
- The existing strategic plan for school development should be revised by formally incorporating stakeholder views for action areas and by sharing the plan and progress updates with the school community on an annual basis.
- High-quality learner experiences, differentiation, and formative assessment should be further developed as consistent practice in all lessons; SSE and in-house and external continuous professional development (CPD) should be harnessed to support this work.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The quality of managing the organisation and of leading school development is good; aspects of the leadership of learning and teaching and of developing leadership capacity have scope for improvement.

### **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

#### **Leading learning and teaching**

Since 2017, an expanded senior management team coupled with the suspension of industrial action in relation to Junior Cycle implementation and some internal staffing changes have combined to enable significant positive changes. It is commended that learning and teaching inputs from teachers are now formally incorporated into staff meetings, and that concrete progress in the areas of support for students with special educational needs (SENs), of digital planning and upskilling, and of SSE have been achieved.

The level of progress in relation to the leadership of learning and teaching is currently at a satisfactory level. A key support in continuing to move forward will be identifying schools of a similar size and creating a support network with them as well as establishing a school-research team to learn more about the systems, supports and challenges in other schools. Also, the school will need to adopt evidence-based approaches to decision-making. Furthermore, the balance of ten Croke Park hours currently allocated for planning and development work on other than a whole-school basis should be reviewed, to ensure that whole-school CPD needed for improvement can be facilitated during the school year.

While the overall school timetable is amended every year to take into account the availability of subject-specific staff, job sharing contracts, and so on, the impact of the timetable on learners has been largely unexamined for a number of years. Priorities for timetable construction now need to be identified explicitly and agreed. For example, given that all but three of the subjects students will study for Junior Cycle will be examined at common level, this removes the need for historical concurrent timetabling practices in most subjects. Wellbeing timetabling needs to be prioritised earlier in the timetable construction process, to harness teachers with specialised training and subject-specific facilities. Timetabling practices around Physical Education (PE) should also be reviewed, to ensure that all students have access to PE for the entire year, providing opportunities for deep learning experiences across all the strands of learning.

At senior cycle, there should be a move away from pre-formed option bands to open student choice before forming option bands. Furthermore, the practice of concurrent timetabling of most senior-cycle subjects to create top/middle/lower honours class groups should also be reviewed, using examination results achieved for subjects over the last three or four years, to identify whether the

perceived benefit of this class formation model is borne out by evidence. An overall timetable review should be undertaken, drawing on formal submissions from subject departments on their needs, balanced provision for subjects, and to work in a phased, planned manner, toward making greater choice among subjects available to students.

Extra-curricular and co-curricular opportunities organised by teachers are key factors that attract students to the school. Good links have been established with outside agencies and school management is strongly committed to managing an inclusive school that supports retention. Other elements of student support include the establishment of an open night for first years, some first-year induction supports and achieving health-promoting recognition for school activities. Transition Year is a highly valued and highly over-subscribed aspect of school life that supports the holistic development of students. Access to TY is by means of interview. It is advised that a few places should be reserved for students who would benefit from the maturational opportunity of TY, regardless of success at interview.

The commitment of individual teachers to student welfare was evident from student-teacher relationships in many classrooms and from interviews with groups of teachers. Inspection surveys and the student council report for 2018/19 indicate that the current student management systems do not meet some student support needs. For example, student support team meetings only take place three or four times per year; these should be organised more frequently. Also, while year heads engage in student management and support for groups of 120 or 90 students, there is no intermediate layer of student support in the school; this situation should be reviewed.

It is advised that the school identify effective class tutor and student-support team systems in other schools of a similar size that would meet its needs, and work toward implementing an agreed, expanded student support system on a phased basis. It should ensure that class tutors and year heads are provided with CPD to agree their roles and communication channels, and that tutor assignment is created as a timetabling priority. The school may wish to consider how a class tutor system for junior cycle students could be introduced as part of its wellbeing programme. Periodic surveys and focus group discussions should be undertaken with students to gather feedback on their needs, recognising that different year groups will have different needs.

An effective guidance department has compiled a high-quality whole-school guidance plan. It has identified good priorities for improvement for the guidance service and engaged with wellbeing planning and with student-support meetings. A further whole-school guidance development is advised. The first-year induction programme should be significantly expanded to improve map-reading skills to orient students to the new campus and to provide study skills training to the first years and all teachers and parents. Moreover, the induction programme should explicitly inform students of the Junior Cycle learning journey they are about to undertake and should incorporate activities that develop students' key skills before commencing academic study. Given feedback from parents and students on delays experienced by students in seeking appointments, school management should identify if additional counselling services can be provided.

Progress in the setting up of a team to deliver support to students with special educational needs (SEN) is appropriate, with good weekly team meeting practices, pre-planning and additional induction support for incoming first years with SEN. CPD is planned for autumn 2019 on differentiation and team teaching to help support mainstream teachers in working with students with SEN in the mainstream setting. A password-protected database should be developed, where teachers can access information about the learning needs of students and strategies for best supporting them. Teachers of SEN need to be briefed by subject departments on the key changes associated with Junior Cycle for their subjects, so that they can integrate that into their planning for

individual students' learning needs. Engaging with external CPD will help the SEN team to further develop its planning and instructional practices.

### **Managing the organisation**

The quality of managing the organisation and of governance is good. The board oversees aspects of school life such as financial planning, policy review, disciplinary meetings with students, and child protection. The transparency provided by posting agreed board meeting minutes on the school website is evidence of good practice. Moving forward, the board also needs to engage in more focussed oversight of teaching and learning in areas such as the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations, SSE, and curriculum development.

Senior management works collaboratively and effectively in managing the school. Almost all teachers and parents indicated in questionnaire responses that the school is well run. Senior management has a visible presence in the school, communicating with staff through well-run staff meetings, e-mails, and ongoing meetings with individual staff or staff groups throughout the school day. School policy development is a key priority of school life. A formal consultation mechanism for gathering parental input on draft policies should be developed.

Almost all teachers who responded to the Inspectorate survey indicated that there is good communication among staff. Significant time and energy have been invested in developing social media feeds of school and student activities to communicate with parents, students and the wider school community; this has been very successful. While the website has been developed as a communication tool, there is scope for posting additional materials in relation to subject choice and other guidance information, school policies, Junior Cycle changes, information regarding parent and student councils, and SSE improvement plans.

Good progress has been achieved in developing the digital infrastructure strategically and in compiling a digital learning plan. There has been strong leadership from senior management and high-quality engagement by teachers acting as peer digital leaders in the digital learning area. Some innovative uses of digital technologies were noted during lesson observations. A plan to facilitate in-house sharing of expertise should be developed.

The school operates as an orderly and secure learning environment. Students were observed moving in a relaxed, orderly way on corridors between classes. In some cases, it was noted that lessons started late or finished early; this aspect of timekeeping should be rectified. Annual risk assessments are compiled through consultation between a post-holder and staff. A written summary report should also be provided to the board so as to keep it informed of annual upgrades being undertaken and of impending larger-scale improvement projects needed for the school's strategic plan. The equipment and facilities for PE should be enhanced to support high-quality learning experiences. Equipment to deliver all strands of the PE curriculum needs to be provided and maintenance of the handball alleys and the fitness suite needs to be planned for.

The school reported that it regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, students and the teacher education institutions.

### **Leading school development**

A draft strategic plan for the period 2017-2020 guides the work of senior management and the board, who jointly developed it. While the plan incorporates informal feedback from some staff,

parents, and students, it should also incorporate formal feedback from stakeholder groups. Relevant in-house evidence sources should also be included, such as inspection questionnaire findings, submissions from subject departments on their priorities for subject development, and relevant trends extracted from the student management software. The 2018/19 student council's report to school management on strengths and areas for development in school life establishes a valuable precedent that should be repeated annually to support strategic planning. Specific planning for the physical infrastructure and equipment/facilities of the school should also be included. Once the expanded plan is finalised, it should be shared with all stakeholders, with annual review of progress, to act as a guiding vision for ongoing school development.

Of the parents who responded to the Inspectorate survey, almost all indicated that they feel welcome in the school, students are doing well and they are happy with the school overall. The survey findings also indicate that a majority of parents are unaware of the work of the parents' council and that the school needs to improve its practices in regularly seeking parents' views on school life.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

A whole-staff review of posts of responsibility took place in 2018, the first since 2008. The 2018 review was well managed by senior management, with board oversight and input. Emerging school needs have been supported through the new schedule of posts. Based on that precedent, it is advised that a similar process now be undertaken by the four members of senior management, and that the resulting agreed individual and collective roles and responsibilities be shared with staff as part of the school plan.

A number of long-established structures have facilitated the development of teachers' leadership skills, including the policy committee, chairing of staff meetings, and the social and calendar committee. The school is at the early stages of engaging with the *Droichead* programme for newly qualified teachers. Ensuring that structured, high-quality induction and an in-house e-staff handbook are provided to new teachers will be a key developer of leadership capacity into the future.

There is a precedent of inviting open expressions of interest from staff to join task teams. It is advised that this be adopted as standard practice, to give equal opportunities for the development of leadership and management skills to all staff members. As the board takes on a more focused role in the oversight of teaching and learning, periodic staff presentations to the board, or written reports, will support the board's decision-making. They will also enable the board to affirm the leadership capacity of the teachers involved. Auditing staff skills to support the planning and delivery of in-house CPD sessions is advised.

While students report that they get on well with each other and that they value the supports for curricular and extra-curricular learning provided to them, their views on how they experience school life have not been harnessed in school development to date. Areas for development to consider should be using focus groups, as well as surveys, to gather student feedback on areas for development and working toward greater student choice of subjects through phased timetable change.

## **2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The overall quality of teaching and learning was good.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

The overall quality of learning was good in the lessons observed. Students engaged purposefully, responding to the high expectations set for their learning in many classes. Where practice was most effective, concrete or digital resources were used to activate students' interest in topics and collaborative learning opportunities enriched the learning of all through structured feedback from the groups to the class. In a number of lessons, learning was made visible to students by using exemplars of standard, leading students to identify success criteria for a good piece of work they would need to create.

While learner outcomes were good overall, the experience by which students learned was in need of development in a number of lessons, as indicated by questionnaire responses from students, a student focus group, and lesson observations by inspectors. To harness the excellent practice already available in-house, teachers across different disciplines should formally share examples of how they create stimulating learner experiences. Key outcomes to achieve would be moving from the concrete to the abstract in lesson development and emphasising the transferability of key skills across the subjects, particularly in the areas of classroom-based assessments.

### **Teachers' individual and collective practice**

The quality of teaching observed was good in most lessons, including very good practice in some lessons and satisfactory or fair practice in a small number of lessons. Where very good practice was evident, teachers created positive classroom atmospheres, lessons were well paced and well prepared incorporating well-balanced teacher and student activity. Good teacher questioning developed critical thinking skills as well as checking recall and recognition. Regular feedback to help the students improve their learning was provided by teachers orally and in writing on student work. Differentiated supports were provided for the more and less able. A key feature of highly effective lessons was the use of a range of assessment modes in class and homework tasks.

Two recurring areas for development were noted across the lessons observed. The first was in relation to differentiation. For example, differentiated questions needed to be targeted across the range of abilities, not just posed for volunteers to answer. Careful lesson pacing and time management are needed to ensure that all groups provide feedback and have adequate time to learn from each other before the end of a lesson. Also, it is advised that groups have opportunities to work on different aspects of a topic and feed into class discussion through exercises like jigsaw. Student choice in relation to classroom-based assessment topics and action projects should be supported to provide differentiated motivation to all students. There are some excellent practices available in-house which now need to be formally shared.

The second area for development in teachers' practice is in respect of formative assessment, where overall satisfactory practice was observed. Many teachers have invested significant time in summative assessments, creating common tests. Many teachers work as examiners for the State Examinations Commission. However, teachers need to use assessment practices that progress, not just assess, students' learning. Priorities for improvement in this area are ensuring that all teachers monitor how students are mastering a skill or concept through an in-class task, identify which students are struggling with the skill or concept, and then adjust future lesson plans, to develop mastery before moving to the next topic. In tandem with this, all students need to be taught to constructively identify strengths and areas for development in a piece of work by referring to co-constructed success criteria.

### **Teachers' collective/collaborative practice**

The school is moving to a new shared platform for uploading whole-school and subject plans and documents and this will be key to future professional sharing and collaboration. The quality of the sample of subject plans evaluated ranged from very good to fair. The best plans included meeting



minutes that reflect a move beyond organisational arrangements to sharing methods and resources, engagement with new subject specifications, and targeted action planning for ongoing subject or programme improvement.

The expertise of teachers whose subjects have gone through Junior Cycle rollout should be harnessed formally. Whole-school sharing sessions should be considered on the successes, challenges and key learning those teachers have gained to support and empower colleagues whose subjects are at a later stage of rollout.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

Progress on management-related recommendations from previous evaluations is good, and overall progress on frequently recurring teaching and learning recommendations is satisfactory to date.

#### **Leadership and management**

There has been good progress in implementing management-related recommendations from a 2013 MLL report.

#### **Teaching and learning**

The implementation of key transferable recommendations from previous evaluations was assessed across all lessons evaluated. The focus areas were effective differentiation strategies, formative assessment strategies, written feedback on student work, and active learning opportunities. Good progress was noted in the use of active learning methodologies in lessons. Overall satisfactory progress was noted in relation to the other recommendations. It is advised that the school put in place procedures to ensure that learning from each inspection is shared across all subject departments and the board should have oversight and inquire about progress.

### **4. THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The school is at an early stage of engaging with the SSE process. It was reported by school management that there had been a lack of whole-school engagement with SSE from 2012 to 2017. It is commended that effective initiatives have now been taken to initiate whole-school engagement with SSE.

#### **The school's self-evaluation process**

In 2018, a designated school planner/SSE post-holder led a whole-staff presentation on SSE, three staff teams were established to lead whole-school initiatives in different areas, and good gathering of teacher views was achieved. To develop and embed a high-quality, school-wide SSE process, the school should engage regularly with students, teachers, and parents on aspects of school life, gathering qualitative and quantitative evidence through surveys and focus groups. Future SSE areas should be selected bearing in mind inspection recommendations, curricular changes, and in-house sources of information on student learning, to ensure that priority student needs are being served. SSE actions need to be visible in day-to-day lessons. As outlined in Circular 40/2016, the school improvement plan emerging from this process should be communicated to teachers and other stakeholders, at least once annually.

**The school's capacity for improvement**

The school has strong capacity for improvement, guided by effective leadership by senior management and the board, staff engagement with CPD, teachers' digital upskilling to support improved collaborative working, and supportive parents and motivated students.

# **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 welcomes this report as it affirms that the senior management team supported by a dynamic teaching staff has enabled significant positive changes in the school in recent years. The Board is pleased that:

- The staff have been affirmed in their care of students.
- Communication between staff and management is good.
- The review of middle management structures in line with circular 003/2018 was effective.
- The inspection report acknowledges the excellent extra-curricular and co-curricular activities undertaken by staff on a voluntary basis.
- Very good teaching and learning practices were observed in the school.
- Students have a wide variety of subjects to choose from and that the TY programme is highly valued and commended.
- The school operates as an orderly and secure learning environment for students.
- The parents who were surveyed by the Inspectorate indicated that they feel welcome in the school, students are doing well and that they are happy with the school.
- The report acknowledges that there is a very strong sense of pride in the school's mission of educational provision in Ennis.

## **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 board welcomes:

- The suggestion of the provision of additional counselling services, however the school allocation is 1.68 WTE and the school uses in excess of 3.5 WTE in the area of guidance counselling and pastoral care. The school would welcome if the Department of Education and Skills (DES) would enhance the allocation of the guidance counselling provision.
- The suggestion of providing additional PE facilities and will make an application for additional facilities to the DES.
- The acknowledgement of the Inspectorate of the work done in the areas of SEN, SSE and The Digital Learning Strategy and we are well on our way to embedding these practices.
- The suggestion that the school liaise with schools of similar size to enhance school practice and development. This has already begun with one school in the midlands and one school in the mid-west.
- The suggestion of the introduction of a class tutor system. The school intends to introduce this through the area of wellbeing.
- The suggestions about the review of timetabling arrangements are being looked at very closely and a committee has been set up to conduct this review.
- The suggestion that the school website is better used to communicate school information has been implemented with an upgrade of the website directed towards parents.
- The suggestion that periodic staff presentations are made to the board. This practice has already begun.
- The suggestion that student voice be further harnessed. The senior management team are committed to meeting with the student council after each of their meetings.
- The suggestion that the school formalise regular care team meetings, as much of this work has been done in an informal way up to now.
- The suggestion to offer opportunity for teachers to share best practice in teaching and learning and this will be facilitated.

## The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

| Level        | Description   | Example of descriptive terms  |
|--------------|---|---|
| Very Good    | <i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision. | Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary |
| Good         | <i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.                             | Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement   |
| Satisfactory | <i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.   | Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas  |
| Fair         | <i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.   | Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve   |
| Weak         | <i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.  | Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;   |