



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Supporting Boards of Management in Primary and Special Schools

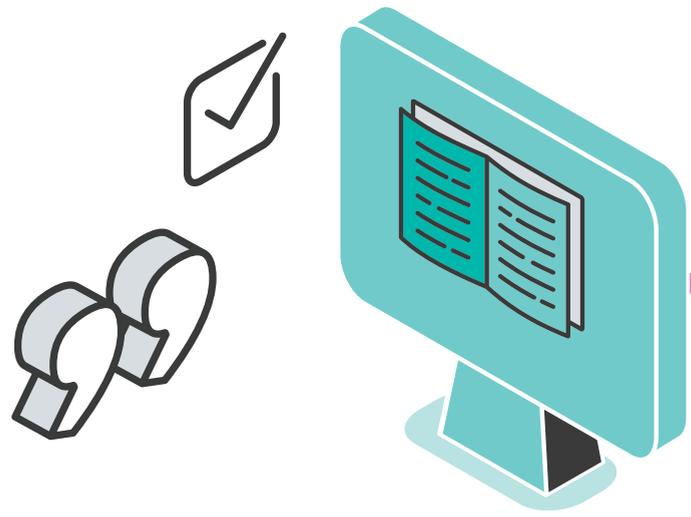
A guide to leading teaching and learning

December 2023



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Introduction

A warm welcome on behalf of the Department of Education as you take up your position on the Board of Management in your primary school. It may be your first time serving on a board, or you may have done this before. Your school and your community are very grateful that you have agreed to take on this vital and rewarding work. Since boards of management were introduced in our primary schools, in 1975, thousands of volunteers, have contributed to the management and operation of primary and special schools. Huge thanks are due to each board member, who volunteers to give their time to this very valuable work. The Department of Education extends a warm welcome to each board member as you take up your position on the board of management of your primary school. Thousands of pupils, all across the country, benefit each year from the hard work and dedication of boards of management. The main work of the board of management is to make sure your school provides all of its pupils with the best possible education in a safe and happy environment. The board's responsibility is to foster a vision for the school, to promote a positive school culture and to celebrate successes in the school community. Your work on the board is informed by various guidelines and support documents including School Self-Evaluation (SSE), Child Protection procedures, Anti-Bullying procedures and Department of Education training material such as the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023-2027* and *Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools*. The *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 - 2023* can also support your work. Patron bodies will also provide support. The Student and Parent Charter¹ can also guide you in your work with the pupils and parents.

¹ The Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019 was published by the Minister in September 2019. Under the proposed legislation every school will be required to consult with parents/guardians and students, and publish a Student and Parent Charter. The proposed legislation will provide for the Minister to set out national guidelines which schools will follow when drawing up and implementing their own charter. At the time of publication of this guidance, the Bill had commenced its journey through the houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill has been passed by the Seanad and completed second stage in the Dáil in July 2021 and the Department is awaiting an order for progression to Committee stage. It is therefore important to check the website www.gov.ie/education for the up-to-date position.

Your role as a member of a board of management

Your role, as a member of the Board of Management, is to support the school to provide an appropriate education for each pupil. Good leadership from the board, the principal, the deputy principal, post-holders or assistant principals and teachers increases the chances of success for all pupils. *Looking at Our School, 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools* divides leading teaching and learning into four standards:

1

Promote a culture of reflection, improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment.
What can we do better as a school?

2

Foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil.
Are all pupils benefiting from the education provided?

3

Manage the planning and implementation of the school curriculum.
What and how are pupils learning?

4

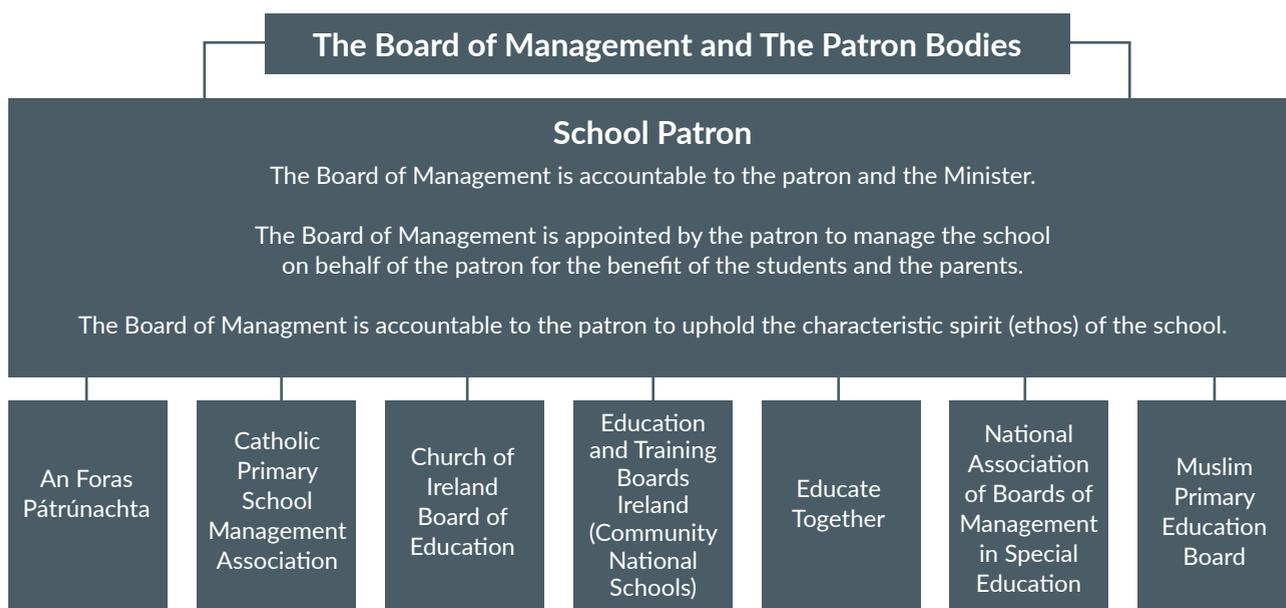
Foster teacher professional learning that enriches teachers' and pupils' learning.
How are teachers supported to teach and help pupils learn as best they can?

Oversight and Governance

Board members are reminded that proceedings of board meetings must remain confidential. In addition, the board operates as a corporate entity and members are part of a legal collective. Your work on the board of management leading teaching and learning will be mostly *oversight* and *governance*.

Oversight means checking something is done. The board may not have to do the task, but they can check the person responsible has done the task. Oversight also means knowing what tasks should be done.

Governance means checking the right guidelines, circulars, procedures and rules have been followed to do the task. It is a good idea for the board to know which staff members may be responsible for tasks. They can help the board with the oversight and governance of learning and teaching.



The Board of Management

The most successful boards have a clear understanding of their job in leading teaching and learning. You are encouraged to adopt a child-centred approach by keeping pupils' best interests at the heart of all decisions.

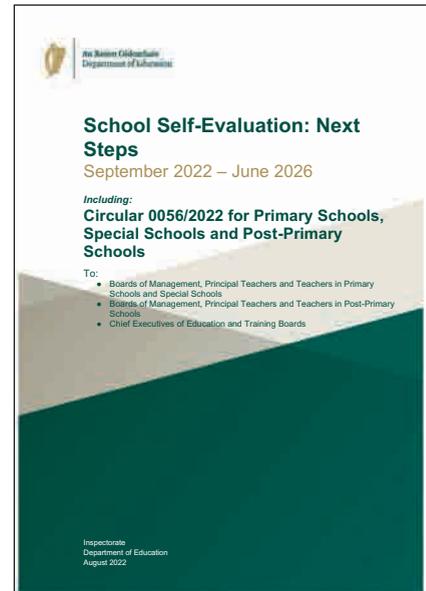
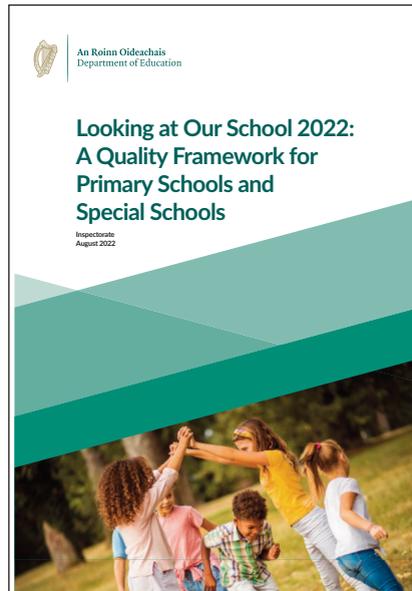
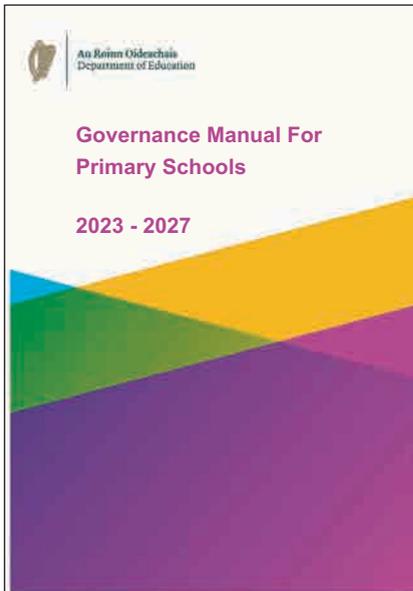
Who leads teaching and learning in your school?

The number of leadership positions in your school depends on the number of teaching posts. In turn, the number of teaching posts depends on the number of pupils enrolled in the school. The table below sets out the number of leadership positions allocated to your school. For example, if there are six teaching posts, your school will have a principal, a deputy principal and one assistant principal II. While the principal has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school, and is accountable for that management, other teachers in the school have leadership roles. Circular 0044/2019 sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised primary schools and recruitment and appointments procedures for registered teachers, assistant principals, deputy principals and principals. In line with the principles of distributed leadership, assistant principals work in teams in collaboration with the principal and/ or deputy principal and have shared responsibility, commensurate with the level of the post, for areas such as learning and teaching.

Teaching Posts	Principal	Deputy Principal	AP I	AP II
1				
2				
3				
4 - 7				
8				 
9 - 17				  
18 - 19				  
20 - 24				   
25 - 31			 	   
32 - 33			 	    
34 - 35			 	     
36 - 37			 	     
38 - 39			 	      
40 - 41			  	      
42 - 43			  	      
44 - 45			   	      
46 - 49			   	       
50 - 59			    	       
60+			   	       

What can board members do to lead teaching and learning?

A good starting point is to read the parts of the documents that will really help you as a board member understand your role when it comes to leading teaching and learning.

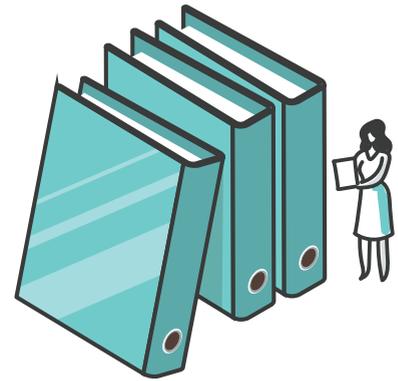


1. The Governance Manual for Primary Schools sets out how schools are organised and the rules boards need to follow. Pages 9, 10 and 11 are of particular use.

2. *Looking at Our School 2022 - A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools*. Pages 34 and 35 describe good practice in leading teaching and learning.

3. *School Self-Evaluation: Next Steps September 2022 - June 2026* will support schools to be as effective as possible helping pupils to achieve their potential.

What does the Governance Manual for Primary Schools say about leadership?



The two areas in the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023 - 2027* that will help you understand how you can do your work in leading teaching and learning are:

Section 1.8 School Leadership

School Leadership

High quality leadership is crucial in establishing a central purpose and vision for a school and the achievement of high quality educational outcomes and learning experiences for pupils. Looking at *Our School, 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools* provides a common understanding of what effective and highly effective learning, teaching, leadership and management practices look like in the Irish school system. It follows on from the 2016 publication of the same name and provides a unified and coherent set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools:

- Learning and teaching
- Leadership and management

The primary purpose of school leadership and management is to create and sustain an environment that underpins high quality pupil care, learning and teaching. Good leadership increases the overall effectiveness of the school generally but is particularly important in the context of the effective delivery of the curriculum, policy development and implementation, school self-evaluation and the creation of a positive and inclusive school culture and climate for all pupils and staff.

The relevant Department circular on recruitment, promotion and leadership for registered teachers in recognised primary schools available on gov.ie - Services for schools and school staff (www.gov.ie/education) sets out a leadership and management framework for in-school leadership posts in recognised primary schools. The leadership framework is underpinned by the principles of distributed leadership and provides flexibility in identifying and prioritising the evolving leadership and management needs of the school. Distributed leadership means the principals, deputy and assistant principals and teachers work together to share responsibility for the pupil learning outcomes and pupil learning experiences. The distributed leadership framework is designed to assist boards/ETBs in the recruitment of principals, deputy and assistant principals, and in assigning and re-assigning post holders to specific roles and responsibilities to meet the evolving needs in a school context. All leadership activities are underpinned by the distributed leadership model.

Boards of management/ETBs must be cognisant of the importance of encouraging and facilitating the principal, deputy principal and assistant principals in developing and effectively exercising their leadership role in the school. The Department has made considerable investment in building the professional competence of school leaders through its support services, Oide supports the professional learning of school leaders and teachers in Ireland through the development of high-quality, innovative and professional learning that enables them to meet the educational needs of all learners. The Oide support service provides a range of leadership development supports for school leaders, including supports for newly appointed principals, middle leaders and established leaders.

What does the Governance Manual for Primary Schools say about school planning?

Section 1.9 School Planning

School Planning

The Education Act 1998 requires the board to arrange for the preparation of a school plan, and to ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated. The school plan sets out the educational philosophy of the school, its aims and how it proposes to achieve them. Pupil learning needs are at the centre of all planning, and the focus of the school plan should be the teaching and learning that takes place in the school.

The school plan is not a static document. It evolves in the light of the changing and developing needs of the school community. It must be regularly reviewed and updated. One of the first tasks of any newly appointed board will therefore be to give careful consideration to the school plan. The school plan serves as a basis for the work of the school as a whole and for evaluating and reporting on whole school progress and development.

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) provides broad and enriching teaching and learning experiences for our children and can be found at Curriculum curriculumonline.ie. However, since its development much has changed in the world and in classrooms and the curriculum is now changing. The Department of Education informed schools of the publication of The Primary Curriculum Framework (The Framework) in March 2023 via Circular 0017/2023. The Framework sets out the vision and principles for a redeveloped, modern curriculum and will shape the work of all primary and special schools for the coming years.

The Framework introduces key competencies for children's learning, setting out the main features and components for the full redevelopment of the primary school curriculum, detailing curriculum areas and subjects and suggested time allocations. The framework links with learning experiences provided through the themes of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and connects with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the Framework for Junior Cycle.

The Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB) was the first part of the new curriculum introduced to schools and is in line with the Framework. It was first introduced on a phased basis in September 2016 but following feedback from stakeholders an updated curriculum document for all primary and special schools, from junior infants to sixth class, was published in September 2019.

The Framework will guide the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in developing specifications for all the curriculum areas and, with the exception of the Primary Maths Curriculum which will be introduced in the 2023/24 school year, these specifications will be introduced in the 2025/2026 school year.

Information on all the areas of the new curriculum can be found via gov.ie - Primary Curriculum (www.gov.ie)

Leading Teaching and Learning. What does *Looking at Our School* say about good practice?

Standard: Promote a reflection of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment.

What does the *Looking at Our School* say about good practice?



Leading Teaching and Learning. What does *Looking at Our School* say about good practice?

Standard: Foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil.

The board and school staff value diversity and challenge discrimination.

School policies are reviewed regularly to ensure inclusive practices.

Curricular and extra-curricular activities are varied and include all pupils.

Standard: Manage the planning and implementation of the school curriculum.

The principal and teachers ensure all aspects of the curriculum are implemented.

The board ensures that the school is managed in a way that provides all of its pupils with the best possible education. *The Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* are used to guide practice

Standard: Foster teacher professional learning that enriches teachers' and pupils' learning.

Teachers undertake courses and professional learning activities to improve teaching and learning for pupils.

The board encourages teachers to undertake activities to support high-quality teaching.

Teachers are encouraged to participate in professional networks to improve pupils' learning.

Looking at our School (2022): A quality framework for primary schools and special schools.
Statements of practice – Leadership and management

Domain 1: Leading learning and teaching

Standards	Statements of effective practice	Statements of highly effective practice
Promote a culture of reflection, improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school foster a culture of reflection, learning and creativity. They have generally high expectations for pupils and lead staff in striving for improved outcomes. They support reflective practice and promote a culture of improvement.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school foster a culture in which reflection, learning and creativity flourish . They lead the school community to continuously strive for excellence by setting high expectations for pupils . They promote a culture of continuous improvement by supporting colleagues to become reflective practitioners .
	The principal, with those leading the process, uses SSE to encourage teaching that is engaging and challenging, to support the inclusion of pupil and parent participation in policy development around learning and teaching and to increase pupils' interest in learning.	The principal, with those leading the process, uses SSE very effectively to encourage teaching that is engaging and challenging, to support the inclusion of pupil and parent participation in policy development around learning and teaching and to enable all pupils to become active and motivated learners .
	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school encourage teachers to develop their learning, teaching and assessment practices, and to share their practice.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school expect and encourage teachers to develop and extend their learning, teaching and assessment practices, and to share and discuss practices that have proven successful at improving pupils' learning .
	The principal and other leaders in the school support teachers to use digital technologies in their learning, teaching and assessment practices, and evaluate the effectiveness of the use of these technologies.	The principal and other leaders in the school lead a process of empowering teachers to embed digital technologies in their learning, teaching and assessment practices, and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the use of these technologies.
	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school encourage innovation and creativity. They recognise the value of individual and collective contributions and achievements.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school actively promote innovation and creativity. They welcome and celebrate individual and collective contributions and achievements.
	Foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil	The board of management and principal ensure the provision of a broad curriculum and a variety of learning opportunities.
Those with leadership and management roles promote an inclusive school community.		Those with leadership and management roles promote an inclusive school community which demonstrably values diversity and challenges discrimination .
Those with leadership and management roles are committed to ensuring that all relevant school policies are inclusive, and are implemented accordingly.		Those with leadership and management roles ensure that all relevant school policies are inclusive and are implemented accordingly.
Those with leadership and management roles adhere to principles of inclusion and social justice to promote equality of opportunity for pupils. They strive to ensure that all members of staff support this ethos.		Those with leadership and management roles establish clear principles of inclusion and social justice to deliver equality of opportunity for pupils throughout all aspects of school life. They do so in collaboration with all staff .

Looking at our School (2022): A quality framework for primary schools and special schools.
 Statements of practice – Leadership and management

Domain 1: Leading learning and teaching

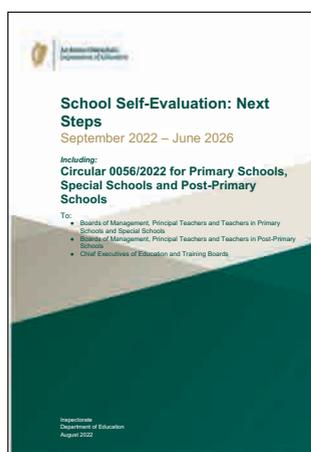
Standards	Statements of effective practice	Statements of highly effective practice
	Those with leadership and management roles, in collaboration with teachers, develop and implement effective policies, procedures and practices to facilitate the sensitive management of transitions as pupils transfer within, between and across learning settings. They liaise with parents, children, relevant teachers/school leaders and other relevant professionals to ensure continuity and coherence in pupils' learning and experiences.	Those with leadership and management roles, in collaboration with teachers, develop and implement highly effective policies, procedures and practices to facilitate and promote the sensitive management of transitions as pupils transfer within, between and across learning settings. They liaise with parents, children, relevant teachers/school leaders and other relevant professionals to ensure continuity and coherence in pupils' learning and experiences. Structures are in place to enable ongoing collaboration with parents, teachers/school leaders, support staff and other relevant professionals, to support successful transitions.
	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school have effective systems for monitoring pupils' progress and development. They recognise the importance of systematic monitoring to help pupils reach their full potential.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school have highly effective systems for monitoring pupils' progress and development. They ensure that these systems are used to help pupils reach their full potential.
Manage the planning and implementation of the school curriculum	The board of management and the principal provide a broad and balanced curriculum.	The board of management and the principal provide a broad and balanced curriculum, making deliberate and informed efforts to meet the needs of the pupils.
	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school efficiently manage curriculum-related planning.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school strategically and efficiently manage curriculum-related planning.
	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school are committed to ensuring that the school curriculum is implemented in a way that provides valuable learning experiences, and are working to that end.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school work purposefully to ensure that all aspects of the school curriculum are implemented in a way that provides all pupils with valuable learning experiences.
Foster teacher professional learning that enriches teachers' and pupils' learning	Those in leadership and management roles support teachers' continuing professional learning in a range of areas.	Those in leadership and management roles support and promote teachers' continuing professional learning in a range of areas, to support high-quality teaching.
	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school seek to identify relevant and purposeful professional learning opportunities for teachers. They encourage participation as a means of improving learning and teaching.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school promote professional learning that is evidence-based and adapted to the identified needs of the school. They maximise opportunities to develop teachers' capacity and competence to improve learning and teaching.
	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school support teachers' participation in professional networks.	The principal, the deputy principal and other leaders in the school support and encourage the active participation of teachers in professional networks to improve pupils' learning.

How does the board and the school engage in School Self-Evaluation?

School Self-Evaluation is designed as a process of collaborative, internal school review that is focused on school improvement. It is used to write the school improvement plan. The process is based on information from a range of sources – including information about the learning experiences of children and young people and how they are doing in their learning. The fundamental SSE questions for a school are:

1. How well are we doing?
2. What are our strengths?
3. How can we build on our strengths?
4. What are our areas for improvement?
5. How can we improve?

The process is about recognising school strengths and achievements as well as areas for improvement. It is about building on the positives as well as taking the necessary actions to ensure ongoing improvement. Advisory and support visits for SSE are available from the Inspectorate. If your school has DEIS status the SSE process is used to write your DEIS plan.



School Self-evaluation: Next Steps 2022-2026 is a single document which includes Department of Education Circular 0056/2022. This sets out what is required of schools in relation to SSE during the period September 2022 to June 2026. SSE is supported by *Looking at Our School (LAOS) 2022* which provides a set of criteria or descriptors of quality in schools. LAOS is, in essence, a set of standards against which schools can consider how well they are performing.

Some questions the board can ask.

1. What needs and priorities have been identified by the school?

2. What targets are in place in the SSE / DEIS plan to meet these needs?

3. Have the views of parents/guardians and pupils been included about teaching and learning?

4. Has the SSE / DEIS plan been shared with parents/guardians, pupils and board members?

5. Has the principal contacted the inspector for advice in relation to SSE?

6. What assessment information is available?

7. Are there learning records for all pupils?

8. How does the school promote creativity and innovation in learning and teaching?

9. Has the board availed of training?

10. What was the impact of Covid on teaching, learning and wellbeing?

11. Are pupils fully engaged and settled since Covid?

12. How can the board ensure pupil learning experiences are improved since Covid?

13. Are images, photographs and pictures around the school inclusive? Do they reflect the school community?

14. Do curricular materials and activities cater for the diverse needs of all pupils?

15. Has the board supported professional development for staff in teaching and learning, diversity, equality and inclusion?

16. Is the school campus accessible for all pupils?

17. How good is school attendance and punctuality?

Remember you cannot do everything!²

CHECKLIST FOR LEADING TEACHING AND LEARNING			
1.	Agenda for Board Meeting	Put teaching and learning on the meeting agenda.	
2.	Leadership Positions and Posts of Responsibility	Who are the post holders in your school? Ask each post holder to give the board a description of their roles and responsibilities in leading teaching and learning. Agree a date for a review of roles and responsibilities (Circular 0044/2019). Consult with principal and deputy principal(s) and assistant principal(s) to make sure the role and responsibilities meet pupil learning needs.	
3.	Does the school have a SSE?DEIS improvement plan?	Has the plan been discussed by the board? Are we aware of the school's targets and areas for improvement? How are the pupils progressing in their learning?	
		Does the plan have clear achievable targets?	
		Have pupils and parents been consulted? Has the plan been shared with the school community?	
4.	School Self Evaluation Visit	Has the inspector been asked to advise about the school improvement plan?	
5.	Looking at Our School 2022	Have you reviewed pages 34 and 35 of <i>Looking at Our School 2022: A quality framework for primary schools and special schools</i> Domain 1: Leading learning and teaching?	
6.	The Governance Manual for Primary Schools	Have you reviewed Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023-2027 pages 8 - 11?	
7.	Inspection Reports or Visits	What recommendations have been made by the inspector? Is the school progressing the recommendations?	
8.	Collaboration	Ask how teachers collaborate. Ask if teachers need any more support to collaborate.	
9.	Creativity and Innovation	Talk to the staff and let them know that the board members are interested in hearing about new and creative ways to help pupils learn. Invite teachers to tell you about things that they would like to try. Communicate with the wider school community about creative ways your school help pupils to learn.	
10.	Inclusion	What is our policy on inclusion? Is there a wide range of activities to make sure all pupils have an opportunity to participate fully in school life?	
11.	Transitions	How does the school support new pupils arriving into the school? How does the school support pupils leaving?	
12.	Curriculum	Does the school meet the needs of pupils of all ability levels? Are all pupils supported to achieve their potential?	
13.	Support	Avail of board of management resources and training.	

² Board members are reminded that proceedings of board meetings must remain confidential. In addition, the board operates as a corporate entity and members are part of a legal collective.

