

St. Pius X BNS – School Self-Evaluation Report on SESE Teaching and Learning

Subject Areas – Geography and History

Introduction and Focus of Evaluation

During the current School Self-Evaluation (SSE) cycle, St. Pius X BNS reviewed its teaching practices in light of the Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF) and recommendations from the Whole School Evaluation (WSE-MLL) conducted in June 2024. Circular 67/2025 identified 2025/26 as an introductory year for schools to develop a shared understanding of the PCF's vision and principles. The PCF emphasises real-world learning, learner agency, sustainability and engagement with the local environment. In SESE, this involves place-based learning where pupils explore their surroundings and develop an understanding of geography and history through direct experience. Following consultation with staff and an advisory meeting with the assigned inspector, the school identified SESE - specifically local studies, field trips and trails in Geography and History - as the focus for the next SSE cycle. This aligns with previous SSE initiatives promoting student voice, wellbeing, literacy and oral language, and supports the PCF principle of active and meaningful learning.

Current Practices in Geography

Teachers already employ a range of experiential and inquiry-based approaches to support geographical learning. Pupils regularly participate in local walks and outdoor learning, particularly in Bushy Park, where they observe seasonal changes, natural features and wildlife. Nature-based activities such as collecting materials, planting and weather observation help pupils engage directly with the environment. Mapping skills are developed across class levels through activities such as drawing maps of the classroom, school and local area, orienteering activities in PE and Cuardach Clóis as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge. Tools like trundle wheels and Maths trails are used to further build spatial awareness and navigation skills. ICT also supports learning through tools such as Google Maps, Chromebooks and iPads, enabling pupils to research geographical topics and explore locations. Project-based learning allows pupils to investigate and present geographical topics using written, visual and oral formats. Guest speakers, field trips and collaborative initiatives such as buddy classes further enhance learning, while structured discussion strategies promote the development of oral language and critical thinking.

Current Practices in History

History teaching focuses on helping pupils understand change and continuity over time through inquiry and discussion. Teachers make strong use of primary sources and artefacts, such as historical photographs, letters, census records and everyday objects, allowing pupils to compare life 'then and now'. Chronological understanding is developed through personal and class timelines. Discussion, storytelling, drama and role-play are commonly used to deepen pupils' understanding of historical topics. Project work and ICT resources support research and presentation of historical learning. Field trips and guest speakers provide real-world connections. Overall, teachers use hands-on, investigative approaches that support the development of observation, sequencing and historical enquiry skills.

Suggestions for Improving SESE Teaching and Learning

Teachers suggested enhancing teaching and learning in **Geography** by:

- Increasing the use of local studies and mapping activities, including maps of Bushy Park and Dublin.
- Strengthening pupils' navigation and spatial skills through tools such as compasses.
- Expanding community engagement, including visits to local services such as libraries, fire stations and Garda stations.
- Establishing regular field trips for each class level.
- Creating shared resource banks and digital platforms to support teaching.
- Encouraging child-led geographical investigations.

Teachers suggested enhancing teaching and learning in **History** by:

- Greater focus on local history and school heritage, including timelines of the school and locality.
- Inviting grandparents, past pupils and former teachers to share experiences of life in earlier decades.
- Developing a bank of historical photographs and artefacts to support enquiry.
- Organising local history trails and field trips.
- Increasing use of creative and digital learning approaches, such as virtual tours and investigative projects.
- Developing shared resource packs and digital archives for teachers.

Summary of SSE Findings

The evaluation identified several **strengths** in SESE teaching and learning:

- Strong emphasis on experiential, inquiry-based learning.
- Regular outdoor learning and fieldwork in the school grounds and local area.
- Development of mapping, spatial awareness and chronological skills.
- Effective use of ICT to support research and enquiry.
- Project-based learning and collaborative activities such as buddy classes.
- Use of primary sources and artefacts in history teaching.
- Opportunities for guest speakers and real-world connections.
- Strong focus on oral language development and discussion.

Key priorities for the next SSE cycle include:

- Expanding local studies and fieldwork opportunities.
- Developing structured field trips for each class level.
- Strengthening mapping and geographical skills.
- Increasing links with the local community.
- Expanding local history and school heritage studies.
- Increasing access to primary sources and artefacts.
- Supporting inquiry-based and creative learning approaches.
- Developing shared digital resources and collaboration structures across the school.