



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Seamount College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Kinvara Co Galway
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	63050T
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	06-03-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	12/06/2023

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

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

## How to read this report

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

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

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

The board of management 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.

## Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.</li> <li>2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.</li> <li>3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</li> <li>4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE).</li> <li>8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.</li> <li>2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the <i>Procedures</i>) since the previous report to the board.</li> <li>3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.</li> <li>4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.</li> <li>5. All teachers visited report that they have read the school's policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying.</li> </ol>

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

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# Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	7 – 9 March 2023
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with board of management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher surveys</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, teachers, and board of management</li></ul>

## School context

In 2010, Seamount College was an all-girls' voluntary second-level school with 200 students. In intervening years, the school has been transformed. It is now a co-educational voluntary second-level school with an enrolment of 607 students, under the trusteeship of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. A substantial building programme was ongoing at the time of the evaluation. In 2022, the school proudly celebrated 100 years of providing post-primary education in Kinvara.

The school provides the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate programme. Part of the school's supports for students is a special class for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- There was a strong sense of pride in the school's renewal in recent years.
- Teaching was very good in the majority of lessons and good in almost all others evaluated.
- The overall quality of learning and assessment was good, with improvements needed in some areas.
- The overall quality of leadership and management was of a commendable standard, with some areas for development noted.
- The school has been engaging with school self-evaluation (SSE) planning since 2012 but the process leading to the agreement and evaluation of those plans needs improvement.
- The school has strong capacity for improvement, guided by effective leadership by senior management and the board and grounded in the development of distributed leadership, staff engagement with professional learning, supportive parents and motivated students.
- The quality of whole-school promotion of student wellbeing was high and good progress has been made on the school's junior cycle wellbeing provision plan.

### Recommendations

- Whole-school meetings dedicated to the sharing of good in-house practice being used by some teachers need to be organised by senior management in relation to formative feedback along with subject and programme planning, to achieve more consistent implementation of high quality practices across the school.

- Focussed leadership of teachers' collaborative practice in relation to junior cycle teaching, learning and assessment needs to be led by in-school management members.
- Implementation of the school's guiding vision "Is every child learning?" requires changes in practice including; the operation of special educational needs (SEN) support with whole-staff professional learning, planning for meeting the needs of a larger number of students with autism, and expansion of the first-year induction programme.
- A broader range of evidence needs to be reviewed when engaging with SSE while targets and practices that were agreed for earlier SSE cycles should be reviewed in terms of their relevance to student needs and curriculum developments.
- School practices and structures should be further developed so that students play a more visible, meaningful part in the operation of the school, with their voices being given due weight in decision-making. Under the guidance of senior management, the relevant post-holders should establish a regular cycle of focus groups and surveys, strengthen the student council, and engage in ongoing review and development of whole-school wellbeing curriculum provision.

## Detailed findings and recommendations

Teaching was very good in the majority of lessons and good in almost all others evaluated. While the overall quality of learning and assessment was good, improvements were needed in some areas.

### 1. The quality of teaching and learning

#### Learner outcomes and experiences

During the evaluation, all teachers fostered positive classroom atmospheres and respectful student-teacher relationships. High levels of motivation, enjoyment and interest were evident in many lessons.

Where the learner experience was most effective, concrete or digital resources were used to activate students' interest in topics and well-planned collaborative learning tasks were integrated, leading to purposeful student engagement and successful outcomes. Teachers' activation of students' prior knowledge or experience to explain a new subject-specific concept was also a recurring feature of effective learning experiences. In the small number of lessons where the learner experience needed to be improved, a greater balance between teacher talk and purposeful student activity was needed.

A consistent whole-school approach to the sharing of learning intentions at the outset of lessons was evident, supporting students' purposeful engagement in their learning in most cases. In highly effective lessons, this practice provided a structure for the lesson that allowed the teacher and students to assess learning during and at the end of the lesson. Also, examples of learning intentions being linked to success criteria to guide task engagement were noted in a few lessons, thus equipping students to self and peer assess the strengths and areas for development in their work. Where practice was less effective, learning intentions were identified in relation to content or a list of tasks rather than focusing on what students should know or be able to do as a result of the intended learning and they were not revisited to gauge the students' learning.

With regard to learner outcomes, knowledge and understanding was generally developed systematically in lessons. There was scope for improvement in the development of elements of the students' key skills in some lessons, particularly in relation to working with others, critical thinking and reflection. Finally, all teachers need to set explicit expectations about how students should maintain their copybooks/folders and need to give feedback on those materials regularly, to support student learning.

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

Lessons were generally very well prepared, underpinned by very good teacher specialist knowledge and with high expectations set for student achievement. Students were encouraged and supported to do their best and learn from mistakes.

Good supports for the range of abilities in classes were noted in many lessons, with teachers posing targeted questions to involve all learners, moving among groups giving customised feedback and support during tasks, and using graphic organisers to help students organise information. Aspects for development noted in the area of support for students with SENs are described in the "Leading teaching and learning" section of this report.

In relation to assessment, a strength of many lessons was good teacher questioning, checking recall and recognition in a distributed way. In a small number of instances, a better balance between global and directed questions and greater use of purposeful higher-order questions was needed, to ensure full student participation and to develop students' critical thinking skills.

In general, teachers were providing oral feedback on student progress during lessons and written feedback on summative assessments (tests). It was also reported that some teachers provided formative feedback through digital means at times. The lack of written formative feedback on the sample of students' work reviewed was notable, while some excellent practices were noted in a small number of lessons in this regard. The school is aware of this area for improvement in teachers' collective practice and a 2022 in-school project gathered specific evidence about teacher and student perceptions of this area. While the project recommended a specific methodology to address the issue, a broader discussion around formative feedback is needed, with teachers across subjects sharing strategies they find effective integrated with a review of the "Formative Feedback" booklet within the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's *Focus on Learning* Toolkit.

It is commended that all subject and programme teams collectively uploaded their plans to the school's online digital learning platform in 2022. Teachers spoke of how this development allows them to see planning practices in other departments and to gain new ideas from their colleagues.

The quality of the sample of subject and programme plans reviewed during the evaluation ranged from excellent to satisfactory. Senior management is advised to organise whole-school planning meetings, where principles of highly effective planning can be identified from a range of in-house plans across the subjects, including a focus on acting on recommendations from individual subject inspections with transferable relevance to all subjects such as formative feedback.

## **2. Quality of school leadership and management**

Overall, the quality of school leadership and management is commendable, with some areas for improvement noted.

### **Leading learning and teaching**

The senior management team is proactive, making good progress leading learning and teaching and creating an inclusive school community. This is evident from the culture of reflection they have fostered and from their high expectations for students.

Very good progress has been made in integrating digital technology as a support to learning, teaching, assessment, and communication among stakeholders over the past four years.

Encouraged by senior management, teachers engage in a variety of professional learning experiences. A model of individual teachers sharing effective practices they have developed with the whole staff has been established. This model should be extended over time as a key in-school professional learning mechanism.

With regard to the school's leadership of junior cycle learning and teaching, it is significant that the school's website has been recently updated, to give more information on the three year learning experience. To further strengthen the leadership of junior cycle learning, focus groups with students need to be activated to identify what is supporting students' learning at present

and the areas where students encounter difficulties. This investigative phase should be followed by leadership of collaboration within and across subject departments to strengthen consistency around the language and approaches used to develop students' key skills, and to help them transfer their learning where appropriate in undertaking classroom-based assessments. The website for the Department of Education's junior cycle focussed "Step Up" project will support this approach.

The TY programme is highly subscribed, provides valuable subject sampling, other learning and student leadership opportunities. Formal evaluation of student, parent and teacher views on the TY learner outcomes and experience should be gathered annually, to inform future programme planning.

A broad and balanced suite of subjects is provided to students in fifth and sixth years. Senior management skilfully manages the student-driven option lines for these students. It is advised that more detailed information regarding the LCVP programme be provided to students, given recent changes to eligibility, to support increased participation in the programme.

A high-quality whole-school guidance plan has been compiled. The guidance counsellor is a key member of the care teams, links with the SEN team, and provides a balance of one-to-one and in-class guidance support to students. A further whole-school guidance development is advised. The first-year induction programme should now be expanded in length, to proactively educate students on relevant learning, digital and relational issues that surface for first-year students, their teachers and year head throughout the year. This would equip the students with skills and knowledge they need before moving into first-year curriculum learning.

Many very effective practices supporting students with SENs were noted during the evaluation. A number of teachers have specialist qualifications in the area and good weekly team meeting practices, pre-planning and additional induction support for incoming first years with SEN were noted. Over the past few years, a significant amount of team teaching was established in mainstream classes. In 2022, an ASD unit was also set up, where the link teachers associated with the unit plan collaboratively with SNAs for the support of students in the Hub. To move support for students with SEN to the optimal level, three aspects for improvement were identified.

First, the information being provided to mainstream teachers to support students with SEN needs to be drawn from the targets agreed in the SEN student support files. Second, the agreement of roles between team teaching partners needs to be built on. A whole-school approach to team teaching needs to be established, to ensure that pre-planning of work to be undertaken by the co-operating teachers focusses on student support file targets, and that regular feedback regarding individual students' progress on those targets is recorded and reviewed, to support ongoing planning. In-school sharing of experienced team teachers' practices in this regard with the whole staff is recommended. Third, the school needs to work toward broadening the national progression pathways it offers to students for whom the established Leaving Certificate is not suitable.

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.

### **Managing the organisation**

The quality of managing the organisation and of governance is good. The board provides effective oversight and governance in relation to ethos, financial and human resource management. The board also receives regular updates on student activities and achievement, new digital and pedagogical developments to support learning, and is a key co-driver of the school's building programme work, along with senior management. To support greater stakeholder awareness of the board's activities, the posting of the agreed report from meetings on the school's website should be considered.

The school has lodged a building application for a sports hall and two classrooms for supporting the needs of students with ASD. All stakeholders voiced strong concerns about the health and safety risks and learning loss issues associated with current arrangements. At present, students



have to walk to and from a rented community space to engage in physical education, often encountering inclement weather and heavy tourist traffic on the narrow road they have to walk.

The board works to meet its legislative and policy requirements. While it is acknowledged that the school building project is in progress, the board still needs to include health and safety on its agenda items and ensure that risks identified are addressed in a planned manner. This should be based on reporting through staff-completed annual risk assessments available through the Health and Safety Authority's 2010 *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools*.

Almost all parents and teachers indicated in survey responses that the school is well run. Positive, productive professional working relationships and levels of communication among the staff were noted in the teacher survey responses.

The physical environment of the school constitutes a significant part of the learning experience of the students. Print-rich environments and displays of students' work were noted on school corridors and in specialist classrooms. This is an area for development for the school in the school's general classrooms, over the coming years.

A key communication mechanism, established by senior management, is aimed at delivering systematic positive student management. It involves a strong culture of year heads reporting on their activities by Friday evening, to support the prioritisation of discussion and decision making during junior and senior care team meetings every Monday morning. It is advised that the school further develop its practices by drawing on the guidance in *Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools: A Guide to Establishing a Team or Reviewing an Existing Team* (2021).

### **Leading school development**

The trustee and board have been proactive in establishing the faith formation guiding vision for the role of all members in school life. A single page graphic organiser sets out the school's development targets in a very accessible way, that would be useful to share on the school's website. The key question underpinning that vision: "Is every child learning?"

The senior management team motivates staff and supports them to engage with the changes required to realise the school's guiding vision. Engagement with change has been very positive and collaborative among staff.

The board and senior management are commended for their leadership of the school's building programme and for the time and thought they have invested in establishing new in-school leadership team responsibilities. The recognition that teachers' collective/collaborative practice needed to be a central part of those leadership roles is vital for the future development of the school.

An additional aspect of school development was the establishment of an ASD unit in the school in 2022. As well as planning for a physical home for ASD support, it is recommended that whole-staff professional learning on supporting students with ASD be planned for, to ensure that students' ongoing integration into mainstream classes is best supported. Also, planning to meet the needs of a larger number of students with ASD (given the number of units in local primary schools) should be another key element of school development planning.

The school has engaged with SSE since 2012, with turnover of the co-ordination role a number of times in recent years. While there has been a focus on producing improvement plans every year, three aspects of the process leading to the agreement and evaluation of those plans need improvement.

First, the school's practice of gathering data in response to very narrow question sets should be replaced by a review of a broader range of evidence including qualitative information such as teachers' professional dialogue, students' perspectives on their learning experiences, as well as quantitative data, and the recommendations presented in inspection reports.

Second, a greater emphasis should be placed on student participation through focus groups to gather open feedback on the needs of students in their learning, wellbeing, and participation in school life. When that open feedback is gathered from a range of year groups, then surveys can be constructed to follow up on recurring themes emerging.



Third, targets and practices that were agreed for earlier SSE cycles should be reviewed in terms of their relevance to current student needs and curriculum developments, to ensure that only the most relevant ones are maintained as part of whole-school practice. Communication of the school's improvement plan to all stakeholders, including students, is recommended, so that they can see the steps teachers are taking to constantly supports students' learning and wellbeing.

In light of the vigorous and ultimately very successful campaign that was launched within the Kinvara community to retain Seamount College after the relinquishment of the trusteeship of the school by the Sisters of Mercy in 2010, it is not surprising that partnership with parents and with the local community is very strong. The parents' council actively supports key activities in school life and is involved in policy development. Parents volunteer to share their expertise at the evening careers fair organised every few years for senior cycle students.

Survey returns indicated that most parents feel welcome in the school, that they are happy with the school and that their children are doing well in school. Areas for further development indicated by the survey should be further explored and acted on by the school.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

The senior management team is highly effective. They avail of the support of national bodies to develop effective leadership and management practices, and link with other school leaders on an ongoing basis. They also develop future leaders within the teaching staff and have established reporting structures that provide them with evidence to guide decision-making.

A number of supports for student leadership are in operation in the school, including the Green Schools Team, action projects, and the two new leadership-focussed TY modules recently added to the curriculum. Sixth year volunteers known as the Student Representative Council (SRC) support first-year induction through peer support. Also, a democratically elected student council representing all year groups meets periodically, supported by volunteer teachers.

Looking to the future, senior management needs to raise the profile of the student council in the school, as there was more awareness and status attaching to the SRC than to the student council at the time of the evaluation. A constitution for the council should be developed with the students and ratified. Ongoing communication to all students of the student council's activities, membership, and contact details for student suggestions should take place. Finally, formal communication links should be established between the student council and the general student body, the senior management team, and the board.

## **3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing**

The quality of whole-school promotion of student wellbeing is high. The school was fully compliant with the child protection and anti-bullying checks conducted during the WSE-MLL. Care team meetings are run in a strategic, proactive manner and the school links with outside agencies to help provide specialist student care. Very positive teacher-student relationships, along with the promotion of high expectations were noted during the evaluation. Finally, the school provides students with many opportunities to experience success through co-curricular and extra-curricular supports, trips and speakers; through the School Musical and various sporting activities.

It is significant that most students surveyed agreed with statements that they "get on well with other students in this school," and that adults in the school treat them "fairly and respectfully." Participants in a student focus group reported that key aspects of the school's promotion of their wellbeing included the "Quiet room" and "Hub" for student support; the introduction of Stand Up week to raise student and teachers' awareness of LBGTQ+ issues; the school's SPHE and Religion classes; and the lunchtime staggered breaks, that increase students' access to the outside recreational facilities.

Good progress has been made on the school's junior cycle wellbeing provision plan. A co-ordinator is engaging with relevant professional learning to lead whole-school wellbeing promotion. A very detailed wellbeing provision document has been prepared. Provision has been made for the first-year students who entered the school in 2022 to complete 400 hours of wellbeing curriculum instruction by the end of their junior cycle. A cross-curricular wellbeing planning team has been established.

Over the coming years, ongoing junior cycle wellbeing curriculum design should be informed by the review of a wider range of evidence, such as recurring issues for junior cycle students being dealt with through the school's Student Support Team meetings. Annual review of feedback on the junior cycle timetabled wellbeing provision from students, teachers, and parents should be analysed, to support responsive, evolving planning. Resources to support this process include Appendices D and E of the NCCA's *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (Revised 2021) and the Wellbeing Promotion Indicators of Success in the Department of Education's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023, Revised October 2019*.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Seamount College welcomes the Inspection Report from the WSE-MLL carried out in March 2023.

The report was well received by all participating parties. The positive affirmations it contains promote further engagement, in particular:

- The strong sense of school pride among parents / staff / students for a school that is thriving after a period of uncertainty about its future.
- The respectful student-teacher relationships with high levels of motivation, enjoyment and interest evident.
- The well prepared lessons with integrated digital technology as a support to learning. The very good teacher specialist knowledge and high expectations for student achievement.
- The broad and balanced programme on offer through Junior Cycle, Transition Year and Senior Cycle
- The effective oversight and governance of the Board in relation to ethos, financial and human resource and in managing the development of the school campus.
- The high quality of promotion of student wellbeing, the high quality whole-school guidance plan and the very effective practices to support students with special educational needs.
- The commendable quality of senior management working proactively in leading teaching and learning in an inclusive school community.

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

Actions to be taken or underway

1. Factor in more time at staff planning days to extend the learning of the Forbairt Team on Formative Feedback - using the NCCA's Focus on Learning Toolkit'.
2. Share good examples from the digital subject plans in relation to Junior Cycle planning and learning and assessment practices / options
3. Extend the practice of individual teachers sharing their learning from Continuous Professional Development experience.
4. Further whole school training in areas of ASD and SEN provision in response to the newly established ASD class and increased numbers of students with SEN.
5. A review of the SSE process is underway including an advisory visit from the Inspectorate and structured around the material in the publication 'School Self Evaluation - Sept 2022 - 2026'.
6. Build on the work that has begun on the inclusion of 'Student Voice' in evidence gathering and decision making. eg
  - The survey of current 5th years to collate guidance material for the transition to senior cycle
  - The Leadership training day provided to all 5th years ahead of applications to the Senior Representative Council.
  - The survey of a focus group of students to assess the use/understanding of Google Classroom / Drive. Roll out the set of teaching videos developed as a training resource.
7. Extend the time given to the transition of 1<sup>st</sup> year students over their initial term in the school.

## 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;