

Danu Community Special School

Our Self-Evaluation Report and Improvement Plan 2026/27

1. Introduction

This document summarises outcomes from the previous School Improvement Plan (SIP), findings from self-evaluation, and outlines the SIP for the 2026/2027 academic year, including targets and actions. In 2025/2026, the school operated in a temporary building with limited space and no PE hall. During November 2025, a refurbished modular building was provided by DEY and a further 12 students enrolled in Danu CSS. Despite ongoing national recruitment challenges, the school appointed full cohort of 8 teaching staff throughout the academic year. However, during the year there was 4 teacher changes. The main focus was Language and Communication, particularly consistent use of visual supports and the TEACCH approach. Progress was made in embedding structured teaching to support student engagement and staff practice. While teaching staffing challenges remained, the school maintained a strong focus on student and staff wellbeing, ensuring continuity of care for learners with complex needs.

1.1 Outcomes of our last improvement plan from Academic Year 2025/26

- The school's improvement focuses on language and communication resulted in the consistent use of visual supports, AAC devices and structured teaching approaches (TEACCH) across classrooms, supporting students' understanding, engagement and emotional regulation.
- Teachers planned and prepared structured learning environments and clearly defined learning outcomes, ensuring learning experiences were predictable, purposeful and responsive to the diverse needs of students with Autism, Moderate/ Severe Intellectual Disability and complex needs.
- Staff capacity was strengthened through targeted CPD, including in-house training on visuals, AAC and Gestalt Language Processing etc., monthly input on Core Word of the month and Lámh sign of the month, internal training in See & Learn, Handwriting Without Tears and Numicon. A designated TEACCH coordinator (AP II A) provided ongoing support to staff to embed structured teaching practices.
- SNA survey feedback indicated high levels of confidence and consistency in the use of visuals and structured approaches. SNAs reported that visual schedules, work systems and transition support enabled students to better understand routines and learning tasks, reducing anxiety and supporting regulation and participation.
- The school participated in a Whole-School Inspection by the Department of Education, with the overall judgement reported as "Very Good". Inspectors referred to the effective use of visual supports and the school's strong and sustained focus on student wellbeing, affirming the impact of the school's improvement work.

1.2 The focus of this evaluation

We undertook self-evaluation of teaching and learning during the period *September 2025 to June 2026 (02.09.25, 16.09.25, 04.11.25, 21.01.26, 04.02.26, 25.03.26)*. We evaluated the following aspect of teaching and learning:

- **Learner Experiences:** Students will engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities where they understand their learning tasks.
- **Teachers' Individual Practice:** The teacher selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to intended learning outcomes and to students' learning needs.

2. Findings

2.1 This is effective practice in our school (list our strengths)

- Over 90% of teachers and SNAs reported that they clearly understood the individual communication modes of the students they support, including the use of visuals, AAC, PECS, objects of reference and core boards.
- Approximately 90–95% of staff indicated that visual supports were always or often available and used consistently across classrooms and settings to support students' understanding of routines, learning tasks and transitions.
- More than 85% of teachers reported that they planned clear, purposeful and age-appropriate learning objectives, supported by visuals, enabling students to better understand expectations and engage more meaningfully in learning.
- Over 90% of staff confirmed that structured environments and TEACCH-aligned practices (visual schedules, work systems, clear finished points) were evident and supported student engagement, regulation and independence.

- Approximately 90% of SNAs reported regular use of individual and whole-class visual schedules, First/Then/Next supports and transition visuals, with staff noting reduced anxiety and improved behaviour during transitions.
- Over 80% of teachers and SNAs reported an increase in students' purposeful engagement and understanding of learning tasks as a direct result of consistent visual and communication supports.
- More than 85% of staff indicated increased confidence in using visuals, AAC and structured approaches, attributing this to targeted CPD, ongoing in-school support and access to a TEACCH coordinator.
- Qualitative feedback from both teachers and SNAs consistently highlighted that predictability, consistency and shared approaches across staff positively impacted student trust, wellbeing and engagement.
- In March 2026, the school underwent a Whole-School Inspection by the Department of Education, receiving an overall judgement of "Very Good", with inspectors specifically commending the effective use of visual supports and the school's strong focus on student wellbeing, providing external validation of the school's self-evaluation findings.

2.2. **This is how we know** (*how well are we doing and how do we know*)

- Structured environments were consistently established across classrooms for daily activities (e.g. tabletop, circle time, lunch etc), with teachers and SNAs reporting that clear physical organisation supported student engagement, regulation and understanding of expectations.
- Consistent visual schedules were provided for students using a range of formats (Objects of Reference, PECS, photographs, written words and AAC), including planned movement breaks, sensory breaks and choice, supporting predictability and emotional regulation.
- Individual visual work systems were routinely implemented, enabling students to understand where they were, what they were expected to do, for how long and what would happen next, promoting independence and task completion.
- Learning activities were set up for success, with staff using clear visual task set-up and concrete finishing systems, allowing students to see progression from start to finish and reducing anxiety around task demands.
- Transitions were consistently supported through the use of whole-class and individual visual schedules, First/Then/Next supports, finished boxes and flexible supports such as movement and sensory breaks; staff observed reduced distress and improved transition tolerance.
- The majority of students were observed following and engaging with their individual visual schedules, using visuals to navigate their day and communicate needs more effectively.
- Visual cues for reminders and instructions (including token boards, timers, First/Then/Next supports, AAC devices and core boards) were used consistently, supporting understanding, regulation and positive behaviour.
- Teachers confirmed regular use of student documentation and assessment data (Student Support Plans, IEPs and reviews, All About Me Plans, Stress Support/Wellbeing Plans, ABLLS assessments, Junior Cycle/Senior Cycle assessment) to identify communication modes, inform visual supports and plan clear, purposeful and age-appropriate learning objectives.
- Staff engagement in continuous professional development offered by Oide, NCSE, AVISTA and In house on AAC, PECS, Visuals, Scheduling, work systems, alongside professional collaboration with AVISTA SLT, increased staff confidence and whole-school consistency, with teachers and SNAs reporting a positive impact on student engagement and understanding.

2.3 **This is what we are going to focus on to improve our practice further** (*what is our area for improvement*)

As per Looking at Our Schools 2016 Quality Framework for Primary Schools

- Target 1: Pupils grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive
- Target 2: The teacher selects and uses preparation and assessment practices that progress pupils' learning

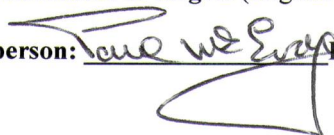
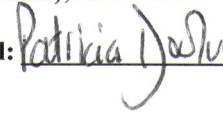
3. **Our improvement plan**

On the next page we have recorded:

- The **targets** for improvement we have set
- The **actions** we will implement to achieve these
- **Who is responsible** for implementing, monitoring, and reviewing our improvement plan?
- How we will measure **progress** and check **outcomes** (criteria for success)

As we implement our improvement plan, we will record:

- The **progress** made, and **adjustments** made, and **when**
- **Achievement of targets** (original and modified), and **when**.

Chairperson:  Principal:  Date Ratified: 17-6-26

Danu CSS Improvement Plan Academic Year 26.27					
Target	Actions	Persons Responsible	Criteria for success	Progress & Adjustments	Date Target Achieved
Target 1: LAOS 2022, Domain 2- Learner Experiences: Students grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive.	1.Establish Consistent, Predictable Small Peer Opportunities. Create planned, optional small-group or paired interactions (e.g. 2-3 students). Groups will be carefully selected based on communication style, sensory needs and behavioural profile. Interactions will occur at predictable times to reduce anxiety (weekly).	Teachers	1. Teachers will read All About Me plans and begin to group students together weekly based on interests.	End of September	
	2. Use Structured, Purposeful Shared Activities. Provide short, purposeful shared tasks (e.g turn-taking games, parallel play). Activities will focus on doing something together, rather than forced conversation/eye contact. Sessions will be time limited.	Teachers	2. Teachers will plan and provide short, structured shared student activities in planning documents.	Dec/Mar/June	
	3. Respect Students' Need for Solitude While Promoting Belonging. Staff will explicitly recognise that choosing to be alone is a valid regulation strategy. Students will be supported to remain part of the class community even when working independently (e.g. shared space). Opportunities for connection will be offered, not imposed.	Teachers & SNA's	3. Teachers & SNAs will support student autonomy by providing consistent choices and connection without pressure.	Dec/Mar/June	
	4. Support Social Understanding Through Visuals and Pre-Teaching. Use visual supports, social narratives and role-modelling to prepare students for social interactions. Explicitly teach and revisit concepts such as personal space, turn-taking, and shared attention.	Teachers	4. Teachers use clear visual supports etc to explicitly teach clear learning objectives for social skills.	Fortnightly plans, SSP	
	5. Develop Peer Familiarity Rather Than Peer Pressure. Maintain stable peer groupings over time to build familiarity and trust. Avoid frequent rotation of groups, particularly for students with complex needs. Focus on being "comfortable together" rather than forming traditional friendships.	Teachers	5. Teachers use knowledge of students' profiles and interests for planning to maintain stable peer relationships.	End Sep	
	6. Integrate Wellbeing and Belonging into Daily Class Routines. Build connection into everyday routines (e.g. morning greeting choices, class rituals, shared regulation breaks). Use consistent class structures so students know what to expect socially and emotionally. Celebrate small social successes sensitively and privately where appropriate.	Teachers	6. Teachers will embed consistent wellbeing and belonging opportunities into daily routines through planned, predictable structures and supportive interactions.	Fortnightly plans. CM	
	7. Monitor Impact Through Observation and Reflection. Staff will use structured observation and professional reflection to monitor student comfort, engagement and stress levels. Student responses (engagement, regulation, avoidance) will guide adjustments. Feedback from staff teams will inform ongoing refinement of approaches.	Teachers	7. Teachers will reflect using on Cúntas Míosúil.	Fortnightly plans. CM	

Patricia Doyle
Chairperson

Patricia Doyle
Principal

17-6-26

Target	Actions	Persons Responsible	Criteria For Success	Progress & Adjustment	Date Target Achieved
Target 1: LAOS 2022, Domain 3- Teachers' individual practice The teacher selects and uses preparation and assessment practices that progress students' learning in the RSE programme (students aged 11+)	1. Develop Individualised RSE Learning Outcomes for Each Student (11+): Teachers will identify individualised/small groups RSE learning outcomes based on each student's developmental stage, communication ability, emotional readiness and understanding. Learning outcomes will focus on body changes, personal care, privacy, boundaries and safety, as appropriate. Outcomes will be clearly documented and revisited regularly. 2. Explicitly Teach Puberty and Body Changes in a Structured, Visual Manner: Provide clear, concrete and visual explanations of puberty-related changes using adapted resources. Teaching will be broken into small, manageable steps, revisited over time. Lessons will prioritise reassurance, predictability and emotional safety. 3. Teach Privacy, Public vs Private, and Personal Boundaries Explicitly: Explicit instruction on public and private spaces, behaviours and boundaries will be delivered in a consistent and developmentally appropriate way. Visual supports, social stories and specific language and terminology will be used across settings. Teaching will be proactive rather than reactive. 4. Integrate RSE Teaching into daily routines: RSE learning will be reinforced naturally and sensitively during relevant routines (e.g. personal care, changing, social situations). Staff will use consistent responses and language when addressing behaviours linked to misunderstanding of privacy. Teaching moments will be calm, respectful and non-judgemental. 5. Strengthen Staff Preparation, Confidence and Consistency: Provide guidance to staff on how to teach sensitive RSE content appropriately to students with complex needs. Agree school-wide language, visuals and approaches to ensure consistency. Support staff to plan RSE lessons with clearly identified learning outcomes. 6. Embed Safeguarding Awareness Within the RSE Programme: RSE learning outcomes will include personal safety, consent at an appropriate level, and recognising unsafe situations. Staff will remain vigilant to signs of vulnerability or misunderstanding. Clear procedures will be followed where safeguarding concerns arise. 7. Communicate and Collaborate with Parents/Guardians: Work collaboratively with parents/guardians to share RSE goals, language and approaches.	Teachers Teachers Teachers Teachers & SNAs Senior Leadership Team (SLT) Teachers & Parents SLT	1. Teachers will identify and review individualised RSE learning outcomes using the school SPHE/RSE assessment document. 2. Teachers plan RSE learning outcomes related to puberty, body awareness, personal care, privacy and safety and explicitly teach. 3. Teachers include explicit teaching of privacy, public and private concepts, and personal boundaries. 4. Teachers & SNAs reinforce RSE learning within daily routines using consistent, calm, and respectful language and responses. 5. SLT provide training and guidance to support staff in delivering RSE. School-wide language to be agreed. 6. Teachers embed safeguarding awareness using RSE Programme for students with specific planning, involving parents where appropriate, and respond to child safeguarding concerns in line with school procedures. 7. RSE meeting with parents at the start of the year.	End of September Fortnightly plans, SSP Fortnightly plans, CM Dec/Mar/June End of October Fortnightly plans, CM End of September	