

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Fhursa
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Marlbog Road Haggardstown Dundalk
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	17550G

Date of inspection: 21-03-2019



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
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WHAT IS 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. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' well-being
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

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 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

Dates of inspection	21-03-2019
Inspection activities undertaken	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with acting principal and in-school leadership team • Meeting with representatives of the board of management, and parents’ association • Meeting with teachers • Review of relevant documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Review of pupils’ work • Interaction with pupils • Feedback meeting with staff, parent and board of management representatives

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Fursey’s National School is a co-educational national school in Haggardstown, on the outskirts of Dundalk, Co. Louth. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh. There has been a steady increase in enrolment and the school currently has 239 pupils enrolled. Their overall attendance is good. The school has recently opened a special class for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The school staff comprises an administrative principal in an acting capacity, ten mainstream teachers and three full-time special educational needs teachers.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Overall the quality of pupils’ learning is commendable; while pupils demonstrate a knowledge of a wide range of vocabulary in Irish, their speaking and reading skills are not yet sufficiently developed. *Cé go bhfuil raon leathan de fhoclóir ar eolas ag an daltaí i nGaeilge, níl a scileanna labhartha ná léitheoireachta forbartha go leor fós.*
- Teaching is of a very high quality overall: a whole-school approach to the development and monitoring of pupils’ incremental skills in Physical Education (PE) and Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) has not yet been established.
- The quality of assessment is very good overall although teacher feedback on pupils’ creative writing varies in quality from class to class.
- The very high quality of care and support for pupils’ well-being is a key strength of the school.
- The quality of leadership and management is very good.
- The quality of SSE is very good; a significant number of school improvement initiatives have been successfully established, including team-teaching and digital teaching and learning initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Irish should be used incidentally more regularly on a whole-school basis to strengthen pupils’ language skills and more frequent opportunities should be given to pupils to use their speaking and reading skills in Irish in various contexts. *Ba chóir an Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil ar bhonn níos rialto chun scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a threisiú ar bhonn scoile-uile agus deiseanna níos rialto a thabhairt do na daltaí a scileanna labhartha agus léitheoireachta a usáid i gcomhthéascanna éagsúla i nGaeilge.*
- A whole-school approach towards the incremental development of pupils’ skills in the curricular areas of PE and SESE should be adopted to enhance teaching and learning.
- Teachers should re-engage with the improvement initiative previously identified in a school improvement plan that gave priority to promoting pupils’ writing and editing skills on a whole-school basis using a range of formative feedback strategies.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- The overall quality of pupils' learning is commendable. Pupils demonstrate very positive dispositions towards their learning and high levels of engagement. Most pupils reported in the pupil questionnaire conducted during the evaluation that they enjoyed their learning and felt that they are doing well in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to be active in their learning with a range of hands-on activities and concrete materials. In almost all the lessons observed, pupils had opportunities to work collaboratively.
- Pupils enjoy a broad range of curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that facilitate their learning. Pupils experience ample opportunity to explore and express their creativity through an extensive range of activities in music, art and drama. There is clear progression in the pupils' use of skills and techniques in both art and music across all strands. The pupils are very accomplished singers and participate in speech and drama activities with confidence.
- Learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy are good overall. Pupils read and speak with very good fluency, understanding and expression in English. Pupils are exposed to a range of genres in writing. However, pupils' learning outcomes in their independent and creative writing show scope for development in a number of contexts and a whole-school approach to writing and editing is necessary to optimise the incremental development of pupils' writing and editing skills. The pupils demonstrate good understanding of mathematical concepts and a whole-school emphasis on number sense and mathematical skills is impacting positively on their learning achievements.
- While pupils demonstrate a knowledge of a wide range of vocabulary in Irish, their speaking and reading skills are not yet sufficiently developed. It would be beneficial to them if Irish was used incidentally more regularly on a whole-school basis to strengthen pupils' language skills and more frequent opportunities were given to pupils to use their speaking and reading skills in a wider range of contexts. *Cé go bhfuil raon leathan de fhoclóir ar eolas ag an daltaí i nGaeilge, níl a scileanna labhartha ná léitheoireachta forbartha go leor fós. B'fhiú an Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil ar bhonn níos rialta chun scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a thréisiú ar bhonn scoile-uile agus deiseanna níos minice a thabhairt do na daltaí a scileanna labhartha agus léitheoireachta a úsáid i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla.*
- Pupils enjoy regular opportunity to engage in digital learning and a significant number of them discuss their use of digital devices and applications with ease and insight.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The overall quality of teaching is very good; almost all of the individual lessons observed were well-structured and effectively facilitated pupils' learning. Where very good and exemplary practice was noted, teachers supported pupils' engagement in activity-based learning, elicited their ideas and reasoning, and enabled them to reflect on their learning experiences and achievements.
- Teachers create an attractive and stimulating learning environment for pupils. They skilfully deploy an extensive range of resources and methodologies, including digital resources, to provide pupils with enriching learning experiences.
- In parental questionnaire responses, almost all parents agreed that teaching is good and that their child is making good progress in reading and Mathematics.
- *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum framework* is used purposefully to support integrated, play-based learning for pupils in infant classes. Teachers in the junior and infant classes have worked collaboratively to embed the Primary Language Curriculum.

- Teachers show a keen awareness of the diversity in pupils' needs and interests: they are currently engaged in an action research initiative to enhance the range of differentiation strategies used to ensure learning is sufficiently challenging for pupils of varying abilities. Pupils are provided with reading material that is closely aligned with their instructional reading ability.
- A suitable range of team-teaching models has been successfully developed to facilitate inclusive, enriching, learning experiences in literacy and numeracy for pupils with additional learning needs. Supplementary support is also provided in individual and small-group support sessions outside the mainstream class where appropriate, with programmes being suitably to pupils' prioritised needs.
- A new class called *Féileacháin* has been recently established to provide for six pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders. A strong emphasis is placed on enabling pupils to use their visual routines independently as they progress from activity to activity. Careful consideration is given to developing pupils' verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Playful, multi-sensory experiences are provided in well-organised environments with due regard for pupils' needs.
- The continuum of support has been successfully adopted and detailed support plans are provided for pupils with additional needs. Careful monitoring and liaison between mainstream and special education teachers ensures suitable continuity in pupils' learning. The individualised programmes for pupils are clearly delineated and, in most instances, the targets are sufficiently specific to facilitate careful monitoring of realistic success criteria.
- Teachers prepare appropriate short-term and long-term planning to support the implementation of a broad, child-centred curriculum. While a small number of individual teachers effectively facilitate the development of pupils' scientific skills and dispositions through project work, a whole-school approach to the incremental development and monitoring of pupils' skills across the areas of SESE would strengthen this learning. Similarly, a whole-school approach to developing and monitoring pupils' skills across the PE curriculum would augment existing practice.
- The overall quality of assessment is very good with teachers using a broad range of assessment approaches very effectively in most instances to inform teaching and learning. Standardised assessment is carefully tracked; screening and diagnostic assessments are used to identify pupils' prioritised needs and to monitor their progress. Almost all teachers facilitate pupil self-assessment in a number of curricular areas. The nature and quality of teacher feedback on pupils' creative writing varies in quality from class to class and the development of whole-school approach regarding the provision of formative feedback will contribute to the ongoing development of pupils' learning outcomes.

3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING

- The quality of support for pupils' well-being is very good and a particular strength of the school. A positive, inclusive and caring environment has been established. There is a deliberate and purposeful programme of work established on a whole-school basis to support the development of the pupils' life skills. Teachers are cognisant of the well-being of the pupils and adopt a problem-solving approach to addressing challenges as they arise. The SET team has implemented a successful programme to foster pupils' social skills development.
- Pupils are very caring and mindful of one another and this was reflected as they undertook the role of 'Play Buddies' during outdoor play through which older pupils support younger pupils.
- Pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their leadership skills through a range of classroom and whole-school routines. A student council has been established; an example of a successful initiative arising from its work is the 'Family Friendly Wednesday' which focuses on a weekly, playful, family activity rather than formal homework.

- Pupils' well-being is also enhanced through their involvement in Green Schools and Health Promotion Schools initiatives. In order to maximise the development of leadership skills in all pupils, membership of committees should be regularly reviewed.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The quality of leadership and management is very good. Parent questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicates that almost all parents think that the school is well-run.
- The board of management addresses a range of responsibilities in an effective manner. The board has successfully managed the growth in the pupil and staff population and the subsequent structural developments. The school facilities are maintained to a very high standard and the school is very well resourced. The board is advised to ensure full compliance with Circular 0045/2013 in relation to anti-bullying procedures; the oversight role of the board requires the termly report to be documented and the annual review of the anti-bullying policy shared with the school community using the standardised templates.
- The in-school management (ISM) team consists of the principal, deputy principal and two post holders. At the time of the evaluation, the deputy principal held the position of acting principal. Suitable systems have been established to facilitate the smooth day-to-day running of the school. A systematic approach has been adopted to the review and development of organisational and curricular policies. A positive, collaborative culture has been successfully nurtured among the staff who demonstrate a strong sense of teamwork and commitment to ongoing improvement.
- The ISM team meets weekly. There is a very strong sense of distributed leadership in the school with individual ISM and staff members showing initiative and praiseworthy skills as they lead learning and work collaboratively with each other to enhance provision. A significant number of teachers engage in ongoing professional development and use their training purposefully to enhance practice in school on an individual and whole-school basis.
- The work of the Parents' Association is highly commendable. They have had opportunities to review a selection of policies and would welcome further involvement. They have made a valuable contribution towards the provision of resources.
- 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, pupils and the teacher education institution.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

- The quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) is very good. The current focus of SSE is the *Digital Learning Framework*. A very comprehensive action plan has been devised with targets which are specific and measureable and clearly delineated success criteria. Focus groups were used as a tool for capturing the opinions of the pupils and an online survey sought the views of the parents. A working group led by a member of the ISM team, has been established to support and monitor the implementation of the improvement plan and commendable progress has been made to date.
- It is evident that previous SSE initiatives on writing genres and the development of mathematical skills have impacted positively on pupils' learning. Staff has identified mathematics and number sense as an area in need of further development and have sought support and advice from the relevant support services.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We welcome the positive findings and recommendations of the WSE MLL.

We are delighted that the report recognises the very high quality of care and support for the pupils' wellbeing.

The Board is also pleased that the report acknowledges:

- The high quality of pupils' learning.
- The high quality of teaching and assessment.
- The positive collaborative culture that has been successfully nurtured among the staff, resulting in a strong sense of teamwork and commitment to ongoing improvement.
- The high quality of school self-evaluation, in particular our current focus on digital learning, where commendable progress has been made.
- The valuable contribution that our Parents Association has made to the school's resources.

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 of Management accepts and acknowledges the recommendations in the report.

Plans to implement the recommendations are currently being addressed by the Board of Management, Principal, ISM team and staff.

- Our focus for the coming school year will be on the use of Incidental Irish on a whole school basis and to integrate it, where possible in other curricular areas.
- We will revise our PE and SESE plans to ensure that there is a focus on the incremental development of pupils skills from Junior to Senior classes.
- We will continue to engage with our previous SSE plans to promote pupils' writing skills across all the genres. In future assessment of this area, we will endeavour to give the pupils more detailed feedback to ensure that skills are developing from year to year.

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 of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good 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 outstanding 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	Good 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	Satisfactory 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	Fair 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	Weak 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;