An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Paul’s NS,
Walshestown, Grangebellew, County Louth
Uimhir rolla: 03787L

Date of inspection: 03 March 2011
1. **INTRODUCTION**

St Paul’s is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh. It serves the areas of Walshestown and Grangebellew within the parish of Clogherhead. There are 98 pupils enrolled in the school. Pupil attendance levels are good. Major renovations have been undertaken with regard to the school building during 2005 and 2009. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

2. **Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development**

The following are the main strengths of the work of the school:

- Pupils' attainment levels are very good in all the curriculum areas inspected during this evaluation.
- There is a strong spirit of collaboration and a sense of shared purpose among all members of the school community.
- An ordered and safe learning environment has been created in the school with all teachers demonstrating a positive rapport with pupils.
- A variety of additional school activities and events add richness to pupils' learning.

The following main recommendations are made:

- The teaching of English reading in the middle and senior classes should be based on systematic skill development.
- A closer correlation between the learning support and the mainstream classroom is advocated.
- The board of management should re-draft its enrolment policy to better reflect the principles of equality and transparency.

3. **Quality of school management**

- A strong spirit of collaboration and a sense of shared purpose characterise the work of the board of management. In order to develop its role with regard to teaching and learning, it is suggested that an examination of trends in pupil achievement, as derived from standardised test results and other assessments, be included in the agenda of board meetings on a periodic basis. In line with Section 20 of the 1998 Education Act, the board should now issue an annual report to parents to include information on funding—particularly with regard to ancillary grants and how this funding is spent.
• The quality of the work of the in-school management team, comprising the principal, the deputy principal and a special-duties teacher, is good. Tasks have been clearly specified for each. To enhance the impact of this work on pupils’ learning, duties for all in-school management personnel should include some aspect of curriculum co-ordination.

• The quality of the management of relationships with the parent community is good. In a meeting with the inspector, representatives from the parents’ association reported the satisfaction of the general parent body with the quality of education provided by the school. This satisfaction is also echoed in a questionnaire completed by the general parent body.

• The quality of the management of pupils’ behaviour is very good, with effective routines in place to ensure the ordered running of the school and the creation of a positive learning environment for pupils.

4 Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

• The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is good. Key organisational policies required by legislation such as enrolment and a code of behaviour are in place. Organisational policies are clear and have a positive impact on school life. Curriculum plans are successful in delineating content and skills between class levels. However, to optimise impact on pupils’ learning, some plans also need to indicate how teaching approaches and methodologies are developed between class levels.

• A process of self-evaluation, including action planning around identified priorities, is in place and is leading to the positive development of school practices. Clearer identification of tasks will assist in optimising the impact of these plans. Planning should identify teaching and learning priorities and, thus, have a direct focus on improving education provision.

• The quality of teachers’ planning varies from good to very good. Where teachers’ planning requires development, more careful attention needs to be paid to skill development within English reading.

• School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools. Evidence was provided to show that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

• Tá caighdeán an teagasc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go han-mhaith. I bhformhór na gceachtanna feicithe, bhí struchtúr cinnte ag gabháil leis an gceacht agus bhí soiléireacht ag baint leis an ábhar nua. I roint ranganna, chun teagasc sa Ghaeilge a thhorbaireadh, moltar go mbeadh na daltaí ag éisteacht le níos mó Gaeilge leanúnach sna ceachtanna. Forbraítear foclóir na ndaltaí go breá trí an scoil. Tá solúbacht agus saibhreas le feiceáil in úsáid an fhoclóra seo. Léiríonn na daltaí tuiscint mhaith ar raon leathan briathra agus ar a n-úsáid i gceart i suímh chumarsáide éagsúla. Tá scileanna na réamhléitheoireachta
The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is very good. In the majority of lessons observed, there was a definite structure to the lesson and clarity with regard to the learning objectives. In order to develop the teaching of Irish in some classes, it is recommended that pupils listen to more continuous Irish during lessons. Pupils’ vocabulary is developed well throughout the school. There is flexibility and richness to be seen in the use of this vocabulary. The pupils display a good understanding of a broad range of verbs and their correct use in a range of communicative settings. Pre-reading skills are well developed. In the middle classes, it is recommended that comprehension skills be developed. Because pupils are succeeding well with reading in Irish, it would be worth enriching pupils’ reading experience through novels and large-format books and to teach lessons based on these. Pupils display good abilities when they engage in writing; they use a sufficiently broad vocabulary and a variety of verbs. In their writing, the majority of pupils display a very good ability to structure sentences correctly using a sufficiently broad vocabulary and range of verbs. With regard to the development of spelling, it is recommended that a progressive scheme be put in place with a major emphasis placed on the selection of social vocabulary and the development of visual skills.

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Pupils have very good oral language skills. The attainment of pupils in reading is good. The approach to the teaching of reading in the infant and junior classes, which is based primarily on a core reading programme, results in pupils reading at an appropriate level with good fluency and understanding. To enhance pupil’s reading development in the infant classes it is suggested that further use be made of large-format books and language experience charts. The successful teaching of phonological awareness could usefully be accompanied by the further development of grapho-phonemic skills and social sight vocabulary. The quality of pupils’ independent writing skills is good. Further opportunity could be provided to pupils in the infant classes to engage in a wider range of writing activities. As pupils progress through the school they demonstrate a good knowledge of punctuation and an increasing ability to structure their writing coherently. They also demonstrate a growing mastery of stylistic conventions. To enhance pupils’ progress in the senior classes, clearly focused skill development should be central to pupils’ independent writing.

The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. The mathematics curriculum is being taught in a broad and balanced manner. Teachers are successful in situating concepts in the context of pupils’ own experiences. In all classes, pupils demonstrated a good ability to answer questions posed orally during the inspection. The ability of pupils in the senior classes to engage in written problem solving requires development, particularly in terms of problem-solving requiring two calculations.

The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is good. Lessons observed during the inspection had a clear and appropriate focus which was also sufficiently challenging. Teachers should now further enhance pupils’ engagement with lessons by sharing the learning objectives with them at the beginning of the lessons, highlighting how the lessons will develop pupils’ existing learning. A positive learning environment complements the taught SPHE programme. In
a questionnaire completed by pupils from third to sixth class as part of this inspection, the majority of pupils report that they get on well with the other pupils in the school, that they feel safe in their classes and in the playground and that they feel they can talk to a teacher if they have concerns relating to their welfare.

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good. Lessons are appropriately focused, sufficiently challenging and structured correctly. Pupils’ attainment levels are very good. A variety of additional school activities and events such as participation in the Green Schools programme, cookery lessons and computer lessons add richness to pupils’ learning.

6. Quality of support for pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. Lesson activities correlate with pupils’ needs and are pitched at an appropriate level. Teaching is affirming and well paced. In some planning, more specific targets need to underpin these activities if learning for pupils is to be optimised. Early intervention work is very effective. For some older pupils, the link between the support and the mainstream setting needs to become stronger particularly in terms of the development of comprehension strategies and pupils’ independent writing skills.