

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St. Philomena's National School
Ravenswell
Bray
Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 07246U**

Date of inspection: 18 January 2012



1. Introduction

St. Philomena's Primary School serves the community on the north side of Bray town, providing for girls and boys to first class, while girls attend until sixth class. Under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, the school's values are informed by the religious and educational philosophy of its trustees, the Religious Sisters of Charity. An inclusive school community is in evidence. St. Philomena's participates in the DEIS programme as a band one school. There were 239 pupils enrolled at the time of this evaluation. The attendance of the pupils is generally good, however a significant minority are absent for more than 20 days in the year. 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.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- Caring, supportive and mutually respectful relationships are a characteristic feature of St. Philomena's Primary School.
- A strong sense of professionalism among the staff, incorporating critical reflection of existing and emerging practices, is a notable quality in the work of the school.
- Highly committed and effective school leadership and management contribute positively to the work and development of the school.
- The pupils' behaviour and their interest and engagement in the learning activities are commended.
- The extent and quality of the displays of the pupils' work in the school are exceptional.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is extensively and effectively used as a teaching resource in classrooms.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The use of assessment information to guide and inform provision for differentiation of the teaching and learning activities in classrooms should be extended.
- To build on the significant progress to date in the pupils' achievement in reading, a whole-school, skills based approach to language development is advised.
- In light of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, whole-school approaches in literacy and Mathematics should be reviewed and strengthened.

3. Quality of School Management

- Very good leadership and management are in evidence in this school. An effective and committed board of management contributes positively to the work and ongoing development of the school. The board conscientiously attends to its duties including the management of school finances and the discussion and ratification of policies. A current key concern of the board is to progress the provision of new school facilities. The work and commitment of the board of management on behalf of the school is commended.
- The principal leads and manages the school in a very effective manner. She works collaboratively and successfully promotes a positive school climate and good working relationships among the staff. The principal is ably supported by the deputy principal and in-school management team, who contribute significantly to the efficient operation of the school and to the positive atmosphere in the school. Post holders undertake their duties conscientiously and tasks are regularly reviewed to address changing school needs. In the parent questionnaires, almost all parents responded positively in relation to the running of the school.
- The school has acquired and developed a wide range of resources to support its work with pupils. A co-operative approach is in evidence among the teaching team and special needs assistants (SNAs). A comprehensive range of materials for teaching and learning is in evidence and these are used effectively in classrooms, and are regularly updated. The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a high standard and good use is made of the available accommodation. Information and communication technology (ICT), including interactive whiteboards, is extensively and effectively used in classrooms as a resource for teaching and learning. The extent and quality of the displays of the pupils' work throughout the school are exceptional.
- Relationships and communication within the school community are very good. The parents' association and the parents of the local community engage in a wide range of activities in support of the work of the school. Parental questionnaires indicate that parents feel welcomed in the school. Almost all parents report that facilities are good and that a safe environment is provided for their child. Building on the existing and beneficial involvement parents have in a variety of school activities, consideration should be given to extending the ways in which parents can participate in specific classroom and pupil learning activities.
- The management of pupils is very good. An atmosphere of mutual respect is cultivated across the school. The good relationships and beneficial experiences pupils have in school are reflected in the positive responses in the pupil questionnaires. The pupils' very good behaviour and their interest and engagement in their classrooms are praised.
- Agreement in principle has been reached with the Department of Education and Skills, the patron body and local management that St. Philomena's and St. Peter's Boys NS should amalgamate and a new school building is to be provided. This will be of significant educational benefit to the wider school community. In light of this and as far as practicable, ongoing collaboration between the two schools is recommended.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- Detailed policy development has been conscientiously undertaken in the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas of the work of the school. Whole-school collaborative approaches to planning and policy development are employed. Critical reflection of existing and emerging practices is a notable quality in the work of the school. The school has engaged in a number of valuable formal and informal processes of self-evaluation contributing to beneficial organisational and curricular development.
- The teachers' plan conscientiously for their work and long-term and short-term planning is of a good quality. Classroom planning is closely linked to the school planning and the curriculum documents.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Good quality teaching and learning is in evidence across the school. A positive learning atmosphere is promoted in classrooms and expectations of active pupil engagement are communicated clearly. The pupils are encouraged and supported to participate actively in the learning tasks. Most pupils indicate that they enjoy their lessons and learning. Parents indicate that teaching is good and that their child is doing well in school.
- In monitoring the pupils' progress standardised testing of pupils and the recording of results is undertaken systematically. The use of assessment information to guide and inform provision for differentiation of the teaching and learning activities in classrooms should be extended.
- Ar an iomlán, tá múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge ar chaighdeán sásúil. Múintear rannta agus amhráin tríd an scoil agus aithrisítear iad go bríomhar. Úsáidtear raon maith straitéisí agus acmhainní oiriúnacha chun suim na ndaltaí a spreagadh i rith na gceachtanna. Úsáidtear an clár bán idirghníomhach go tairbheach le linn na hoibre seo agus tá scileanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí á bhforbairt. Moltar béim sa bhreis a chur ar fhorbairt scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí agus athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge sa chomhthéacs seo. Moltar freisin béim sa bhreis a chur ar an leanúnachas i bhforbairt scileanna teanga na ndaltaí ó rang go rang.
- *Overall the teaching and learning in Irish is of a satisfactory standard. A range of rhymes and songs are taught across the school and the pupils recite them in a lively manner. A good range of strategies and suitable resources are used to promote the pupils' interest in the lessons. Positive use is made of the interactive white board in this area and the pupils' skills in reading and writing are being developed. Further emphasis on the development of the pupils' oral language skills is advised and in this context a review of the approach to the teaching of Irish should be undertaken. Additional attention to continuity in the development of the pupils' language skills from class to class is also advised.*
- Language and literacy are given careful attention across the school and good progress in the achievement of the pupils is in evidence. Teachers use a wide range of strategies including, structured phonics programme, graded reading schemes, class novels and paired-reading and peer reading programmes. Initiatives such as *Reading Recovery* are being implemented successfully. Most pupils report that they are doing well at reading.

Pupils are encouraged to write for a variety of purposes and audiences, and in a range of genres. Cross-curricular approaches are profitably explored and the pupils have produced some very good examples of work. In light of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, whole school approaches to language and literacy should be reviewed and strengthened. The adoption of a common approach to language development across the curriculum should be considered as a priority area for further development.

- In Mathematics, a variety of approaches is employed across the school with an appropriate emphasis on fostering active pupil participation. Group and pair work, station-teaching and whole class teaching were observed. Very good resources and the use of relevant concrete materials and visual aids are in evidence. Initiatives such as *Maths Recovery* are being implemented successfully. Teachers give good attention to the development of the pupils' mathematical language in lessons and cross-curricular links are profitably explored in a number of classrooms. In the context of the range of learning needs in classrooms, further use of differentiated approaches is advised. In light of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, a review of the whole-school approach to Mathematics should be undertaken.
- Good practice is evident in the teaching of Science and some excellent examples of pupils being provided with opportunities to become actively involved in the lessons and in "working as a scientist" were observed. Fine examples of the pupils' work are attractively displayed in classrooms and circulation areas. The school participates successfully in the *Green Schools Programme*. The pupils demonstrate generally good levels of interest and understanding of the topics covered. Good use is made of ICT as a research tool. It is recommended that the school extend ways of sharing good practice in this area through, for example, the use of team teaching approaches.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- A highly committed special educational needs (SEN) team provides high quality support for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and to pupils for whom English is an additional language. School policy in the area of Special Education has been carefully developed. The school has placed an appropriate emphasis on early identification of pupils' learning needs and on early intervention. Conscientious planning and good co-operation between classroom and SEN teachers are in evidence in respect of overall provision and for individual pupils. A wide range of SEN resources, including ICT materials, has been acquired. Very good practice was observed in classrooms and resource settings where pupils were skilfully supported in becoming positively engaged in the learning process. Consideration should be given to extending practices to strengthen co-operative teaching approaches. Strategies to increase parental participation in particular aspects of the pupils' learning programmes should also be considered.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management and staff of St. Philomena's School wish to acknowledge the professionalism of the reporting inspector and his team for the positive and affirming experience that was a feature of our Whole School Evaluation.

The Board appreciates the recognition and affirmation in regard to:

- The caring, supportive and mutually respectful relationships in the school community.
- The highly committed and effective school leadership and management.
- The notable quality of the staff's professionalism and critical reflection.
- The exceptional quality and extent of the pupils' work on display.
- The commendation of the pupils' behaviour and their best interest and engagement in their learning.
- The effective and extensive use of ICT.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

As part of our recognised formal and informal self evaluation process, the areas recommended for further development had already been identified in the school's development plan. Since the WSE, implementation of the plan has continued. The Board and staff will continue to reflect, improve and progress the school to provide the best educational experiences for our pupils in partnership with our parent body.