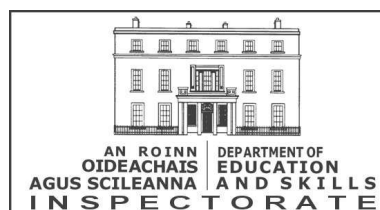


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT**

**St Thomas the Apostle N.S.
Rosegreen, Cashel, Co. Tipperary
Uimhir rolla: 11605V**

Date of inspection: 5 June 2014



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in St Thomas the Apostle National School in June 2014. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal and with board and parent representatives, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. 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.

St Thomas the Apostle School, situated in Rosegreen, Cashel, Co. Tipperary, is a Catholic primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Cashel and Emly. A slight increase in enrolment in recent years has resulted in a current enrolment of 150 pupils. It is reported that attendance is very good.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- School leadership is characterised by openness and a collective responsibility for all aspects of school life.
- Staff creates a positive school atmosphere that is conducive to teaching and learning.
- Pupils are presented with a broad learning programme in which they engage with enthusiasm and interest.
- The board of management is committed to promoting school improvement.
- The management of pupils is very effective with respectful relationships in evidence between teachers and pupils.
- The parents' association commendably supports the work of the school.

The following **recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should engage in additional strategic planning practices to ensure more effective management of finances and resources.
- The practice of the special educational needs teachers teaching whole-class units should cease. A greater balance between in-class support and withdrawal within the special educational needs context should be achieved.
- A wider range of policies should be formulated in accordance with legislation. Greater parental involvement in policy design and review is also advised.
- Whole-school planning, teacher planning and progress records should be further aligned to promote greater consistency and continuity in curriculum delivery.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- The overall quality of pupils' learning achievements is very good. Commendable emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' skills and knowledge through the delivery of a broad curriculum. Pupils are motivated to learn and engage with enthusiasm in the learning activities.
- Pupils' literacy skills are very well developed. Pupils engage confidently and articulately in class discussion. They are afforded regular opportunities to recite, create and explore poetry. Reading standards are generally high. The provision for early literacy development through the *Aistear* programme is commendable. A variety of differentiated reading material is now required to extend pupils' reading

experiences. More regular opportunities for pupils to engage in creative writing is recommended, supported by the development of a whole-school approach to penmanship.

- Aithnítear na hiarrachtaí macánta atá á ndéanamh chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga chaidrimh. Moltar go mór an stór leathan de leaganacha cainte atá ar eolas ag daltaí sna hardranganna. Léann siad le tuiscint agus le líofacht. Baintear leas fiúntach as rainn agus amhráin ach is b'fhiú feidhm níos mó a bhaint as an scéalaíocht. Chonacthas roinnt dea-shamplaí de scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach. Ní foláir tuilleadh deiseanna a sholáthar do na daltaí scríbhneoireacht neamhspléach a chleachtadh ar bhonn rialta.
- *Sincere efforts to promote Irish as the language of communication is recognised. The use of a wide range of phrases, particularly by pupils in the senior class, is praiseworthy. Pupils read with understanding and fluency. Poetry and song are employed to good effect, but greater use should be made of story. Some examples of creative writing is noted. However, pupils should be provided with more frequent opportunities to engage in independent writing activities.*
- Pupils demonstrate appropriate understanding of key mathematical concepts and processes. Activity-based learning is promoted. The effective application of mathematics to real life situations is a feature of practice in some classrooms. Further discussion and exploration of topics is recommended. An increased engagement in copybook activity is also advised.
- Pupils' with special education needs (SEN) benefit from the inclusive welcoming atmosphere in the school and engage productively in structured learning activities. In general, their progress is commensurate with their abilities.

2. Quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is very good and is characterised by well-structured and appropriately paced lessons. Skilful use is made of a range of methodologies. The further enhancement of information and communication technology (ICT) resources to support pupils' learning is recommended.
- Clear relevant detail is recorded in classroom plans. A greater alignment of whole-school planning, teacher planning and progress records is recommended in promoting consistency and continuity in curriculum delivery. Whole-school organisational and curricular plans need to be reviewed and further developed.
- The judicious use of reading activities contributes to pupils' positive attitudes to reading. The implementation of additional in-class initiatives would greatly assist in the delivery of a differentiated reading programme.
- Baintear úsáid thairbheach as straitéisí éagsúla chun cumas labhartha na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a fhorbairt. Ní mór, áfach, suímh chumarsáide a chruthú go rialta chun deiseanna a thabhairt do dhaltaí an teanga a chleachtadh. Is gá an réimse fíorleabhair léitheoireachta a mhéadú.
- *Productive use of a range of strategies to promote pupils' oral competency in Irish is used. However, it is necessary to create regular communicative opportunities for pupils to practice the language. It is also necessary to increase the range of reading material available.*
- The teaching of numeracy is very good in many cases. Good questioning resulted in worthy engagement by pupils. The preparation of resource materials is praiseworthy, as is the monitoring of pupil progress.

- Teachers demonstrate a clear commitment to addressing the learning needs of pupils who present with special educational needs. Support is mainly through withdrawal, either individually or in groups. A greater balance between withdrawal and in-class support should be advanced. Individual learning plans are characterised by clear relevant detail. Teachers' short-term plans and progress records are very well structured. Greater use of concrete material is advised in the teaching of numeracy.
- Teachers record good detail in assessment folders. A whole-school policy on assessment should be devised. Teachers should also reach agreement on the required data in an assessment folder.

3. Support for pupils' wellbeing

- The management of pupils is very effective. A positive inclusive environment is fostered. Pupils are very well-behaved and, in general, demonstrate high levels of confidence and respect. Pupil questionnaire responses indicate very positive findings of their experiences of school life.
- Learning support timetables indicate an allocation of time for the purposes of individual teacher planning. This practice should cease. Staff is advised to review the process of taking specific classes for Mathematics in favour of more focussed in-class interventions. Support teachers are advised to meet formally. Special needs assistants (SNA) are very supportive of pupils' learning within classroom settings.
- 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*.

4. Leadership and Management

- In general the quality of leadership and management is good. The board works conscientiously. It is advised, however, that detailed financial accounts be furnished at every board meeting and externally audited on a regular basis. The board is advised to engage in more strategic planning to ensure that the priority needs of the school are met. While school planning is well developed, it is recommended that some policies, required under legislation, be formulated in collaboration with all stakeholders. The provision of a wider range of resources to include books, equipment and ICT is advised.
- The recently appointed principal successfully promotes a positive school climate. The deputy principal contributes purposefully to the operation of the school. Staff work in a collaborative and dedicated manner. Regular in-school management meetings would further enhance the work of the team. It is advised that duties be reviewed in response to the evolving priorities of the school. A staff rotation policy should also be formulated.
- The parents' association actively supports the work of the school. Parents commendably undertook the task of organising a book rental scheme. However, it is recommended that the monies accrued from this scheme be better spent on reading material rather than on workbooks. Parents' responses to questionnaires indicate a high level of satisfaction with the educational provision in the school.

5. School Self-evaluation

- The school has engaged in a number of valuable, evidenced-based processes of self-evaluation which has culminated in a school improvement numeracy plan. Both parents and pupils have contributed to this process favourably. In order to implement its improvement plan successfully, very specific targets should be outlined for each class level. Systematic review and monitoring of the improvement plan is advised.

Conclusion

The school's capacity to engage in school improvement is very good. Teachers work collaboratively and demonstrate an openness to new ideas.