

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál,
Kilsaran, Castlebellingham, Co. Louth
Uimhir rolla: 14207B**

Date of inspection: 13 February 2014



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

1. Introduction

Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál is located in Kilsaran, Castlebellingham, County Louth and is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh. The school has seven mainstream classes, a special class for pupils with severe/profound general learning disability, two special classes for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and a pre-school class for pupils with ASD. In addition, three support teachers provide support to pupils from the mainstream classes who have additional learning needs. There are thirteen special needs assistants (SNAs) on the school staff, the majority of whom are in full-time posts. There are 196 pupils enrolled in the school and attendance levels are high among almost all pupils. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education was evaluated. 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:

- Leadership and management of this school are of a very high quality. Leadership is strongly characterised by care, reflection and democratic and transparent decision making.
- The quality of the management of pupils is very good in the school as a whole. Worthy of particular commendation are the great care and skill exhibited in the management of challenging and complex behaviours when they occur in the special class settings.
- The quality of whole-school planning and the school's self-evaluation process is very good.
- The sustained improvements achieved by the principal and teachers in pupils' literacy and numeracy levels through reflection, careful implementation and ongoing evaluation of whole-school approaches are highly commendable.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English, Mathematics and Physical Education is very good.
- The quality of pupils' educational experiences in the pre-school class, the special classes for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and in the special class for pupils with severe/profound general learning disability is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- There is scope for development in some aspects of teachers' short-term planning. It is recommended that the school develops an agreed approach to short-term planning.
- Sa Ghaeilge labhartha, moltar cur a thuilleadh le muinín na ndaltaí i láimhsiú an-chruinn bhriathra agus conas tabhairt faoi chomhrá níos leithne. *In oral Irish, improving pupils' confidence in the accurate use of verbs and their ability to engage in extended conversation are recommended.*
- The school should give strong consideration to moving towards a more common format for individual education plans (IEP).

3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is effective. The board is constituted properly and meets regularly. School financial matters are managed prudently and efficiently. The board is committed to the school, is very aware of its statutory obligations and of the importance of operating in accordance with established procedures. The members bring a range of practical skills and experience to their roles.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. The leadership demonstrated by the principal is of a very high standard across all areas of school leadership and management. The members of the in-school management team perform their duties with dedication and diligence. They have led the introduction and consolidation of new educational initiatives capably and contribute measurably to the effective organisation of the school. The in-school management team's democratic decision making is highly commendable and is a strength of the school's operation.
- The quality of the management of resources is very good. The deployment of teachers has been very effective in supporting learning. Throughout the school, a wide range of effective resources is in place to support teaching and learning. In the special classes, very good quality physical resources have been obtained to meet pupils' specific needs.
- The quality of relations with the school community is very good. During their pre-evaluation meeting, representatives of the parents' association confirmed positive relations between home and school and acknowledged the approachability of the principal and teachers and the ethos of hard work within the school. In parent questionnaire responses, a very high percentage of respondents expressed their satisfaction with the school, with the quality of welcome and with how the school is run. Questionnaire responses also indicated some doubt among parents with regard to their knowledge of the content of the school's relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy. The school should engage further with parents about this policy area. Valuable relationships have been established with other parties in the community to support the provision of high-quality education.
- The management of pupils is very good. During the evaluation all pupils consistently demonstrated courtesy and respect towards one another, towards the teachers and other members of staff and a great willingness to learn. The management of pupils' behaviour, including the challenging and complex behaviours that occur in special class settings, is carried out with great sensitivity and care. This effective management facilitates rich learning across the school and is a key strength of educational provision. Almost all parents of pupils in the special classes agreed in their questionnaire responses that the school manages challenging behaviour well. Almost all pupils who completed a questionnaire agreed that they feel safe in class and that they attend a good school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is very good. An effective action-planning approach has supported the development of whole-school organisational and curricular planning and very commendable progress has been achieved. Whole-school plans are very specific in terms of the guidance they provide for teachers. The school has engaged in very worthwhile self-evaluation over a number of years. This work has led to the establishment of comprehensive evidence-based self-evaluation practices. It is noted that the school has determined that Irish will be its next area for self-evaluation. A particular focus on engagement with pupils is advocated to provide valuable evidence for the process in respect of Irish.

- The implementation and impact of school planning and self-evaluation are commendable. Specific teaching practices, such as station teaching in mainstream classes, have arisen from the findings of focused self-evaluation. Teachers' long-term classroom planning is well informed by the school plan and is of a very good standard. There is scope for development in some aspects of teachers' short-term planning. It is recommended that the school develops an agreed approach to short-term planning, the format of which should facilitate inclusion of an appropriate level of detail regarding learning objectives, learning activities, differentiation and assessment. The school has already implemented such an approach successfully to revise the format of monthly progress records. Teachers' practical preparation in terms of teacher-made resources in both mainstream and special education settings is worthy of the highest commendation.
- 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

- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc, na foghlama agus ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge go maith. Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na teanga. Rinneadh meastóireacht ar raon an-shásúil de mhodheolaíochtaí le linn ceachtanna. I bhformhór na ranganna, bhain oidí úsáid éifeachtach as raon leathan áiseanna spreagúla chun rannpháirtíocht a éascú agus scafall a thabhairt don chomhrá idir oidí agus daltaí agus idir dhaltaí. Nuair ar breathnaíodh na cleachtais ab fhearr, thug oidí go cinnte faoi scileanna a fhorbairt thar na ceithre snáitheanna; san obair ó bhéal thug siad faoi mhúnlú cruinn ceart agus daltaí a scafaill i gcruithú abairtí. B'fhiú, áfach, thar an scoil cur a thuilleadh le muinín na ndaltaí i láimhsiú an-chruinn bhriathra agus conas tabhairt faoi chomhrá níos leithne. Sa léitheoireacht, léirigh daltaí tuiscint agus cumas breá. Tá úsáid an-bhreá á bhaint as raon foinsí, fíorleabhair ina measc inti. Bhí samplaí inmholta de scríbhneoireacht phearsanta le sonrú i ranganna áirithe. Moltar tuilleadh deiseanna don scríbhneoireacht ar raon de théamaí. Tá cnuasach iontach de rainn agus d'amhráin ar eolas ag na daltaí. Tríd an scoil, tá raon breá filíochta á foghlaim acu.
- *The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. A positive attitude to the language is fostered. A range of very satisfactory methodologies was evaluated during lessons. In most classes, teachers used a broad range of stimulating resources to encourage participation and provide scaffold to conversation between teacher and pupils and among pupils. Where the best practices were observed teachers developed skills across the four strands; in oral language work, they modelled accurately and sought to scaffold pupils during the creation of sentences. Across the school, however, there is need to improve pupils' confidence in the accurate use of verbs and their ability to engage in extended conversation. In reading, pupils demonstrated understanding and fine ability. Very good use is made of a range of sources, authentic books included. Commendable examples of personal writing were noted in specific classes. More opportunities for writing on a range of themes are advocated. Pupils know an excellent variety of rhymes and songs. Throughout the school, they are learning a fine range of poetry.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good. The implementation of station teaching has contributed to sustained improvement in pupils' literacy levels. The work of class and support teachers in this regard is commended. The development of phonics skills is attended to assiduously. Observed reading lessons were effective with good emphasis placed on reading a broad range of quality texts, including novels. Teachers' careful preparation of reading material for their pupils is laudable. Guided reading strategies are used effectively. Exemplary practices involving the use of story

books were observed in special class settings. High-quality experiences using carefully prepared texts and sensory resources provide rich learning in language. There is well-scaffolded development of pupils' creative writing. The development of the writing process is very good across a broad range of genres. There is some variation across the school in the quality of penmanship, however. It is recommended that a programme to develop penmanship be implemented. In mainstream settings, pupils' oral language skills are developed well and pupils express themselves articulately. In the special classes, excellent emphasis is placed on the development of language and communication and highly commendable successes are evident, helping pupils to realise their individual potentials.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. The evident progression achieved by the school in pupils' achievement in standardised tests is admirable. Teaching quality observed in this subject was very commendable overall. In almost all lessons great emphasis was placed on ensuring that pupils had opportunities to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts through the purposeful use of stimulating concrete and other resources. Pupils are taught effective problem-solving strategies and are able to articulate the rationales they use in this type of activity. In the special classes and support settings, pupils' understanding of numeracy and the practical application of mathematics is progressed effectively through consistent use of physical resources.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Physical Education (PE) is very good. A broad and balanced programme enables pupils to experience all strands of the PE curriculum comprehensively. Lessons evaluated featured high levels of purposeful engagement and all were well structured and well paced. Teachers created very effective opportunities for pupils to develop specific skills and to explore physical activity imaginatively. Pupils demonstrated a very positive attitude to PE.
- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the school is very good, with exemplary practices evident in different aspects of curriculum delivery in different settings and also some few aspects for further improvement. In a very small number of cases, more attention to developing the different stages of lessons will enrich teaching quality even further. Pupils' questionnaire responses indicate that there is scope for pupils to use information and communications technology more during lessons.
- The quality of assessment is commendable overall with some very high quality practices in particular classes and settings. There is very purposeful tracking of standardised test results. Some exemplary assessment for learning practices were evident in mainstream settings. Teachers carefully analyse and provide constructive feedback to pupils on their work. Very good examples of peer evaluation and pupil self-evaluation were also seen. High-quality assessment for, and assessment of learning practices were evident in the special classes. There is frequent consultation and communication between teachers in mainstream and support settings. To further support assessment provision overall, there is scope to expand the range of diagnostic testing materials available for use in support settings.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The access of pupils with special educational needs and their participation in learning appropriate to their needs are very good. The commitment of the school community to the provision of high-quality education to the pupils in the special classes and to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the life of the school is strongly evident. Pupils experience very good opportunities for language and communication and for making choices. Their experiences in reading and story are of high quality including access to big picture books, sensory stories and books about the world about them prepared by the

teachers themselves. Very good attention is paid to learning in a social environment and to developing a sense of self and of relation to others. Access to learning is guided either by individual education plans (IEPs) or by class-support plans. Priority learning needs are well identified. Teachers' planning provides for the delineation of the steps and approaches towards the learning goals. Almost all targets are clear and in the case of a very small number more measurability could be achieved and achievement criteria included for all targets. Strong consideration should be given to moving towards a more common format of IEP. Some class support plans would benefit from aligning further with the target-setting approaches observed in special classes as some goal setting is too broad.

- The quality of teaching approaches and interventions for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Teaching observed in support settings was focussed and well-structured. Concepts were explained clearly and good use made of supporting resources to support pupils' understanding. Effective, very carefully prepared lessons were observed in the special class for pupils with severe/profound general learning disability. In the three special classes for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, unambiguous language is used, along with visual cues and work schedules during lessons. Purposefully structured learning environments are prepared. Comprehensive preparation of valuable resources tailored to the specific needs of pupils takes place. The use of different types of physical material, audio-visual and ICT resources, contributes to rich learning experiences for pupils and supports progression in learning commensurate with their abilities. A careful balance between individual and group work ensures good opportunities for the development of skills of socialisation. In all of the special classes, very good cognisance is taken of the guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- The quality of outcomes and progression of pupils with special educational needs observed during the evaluation was very good. Almost all parents of pupils in the special classes confirmed in their questionnaire responses that the school helps their child's social and personal development, with language and communication and to interact well with others. Almost all parents were of the opinion that teaching is good in these settings and that their child is doing well in school.
- The quality of the work of special needs assistants (SNAs) is very good and excellent collaboration is evident between teachers and SNAs. Their engagement with pupils and the team ethic which characterises daily interaction are worthy of specific commendation.

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 of Sc Mhuire gan Smal, Kilsaran welcome the findings of our WSE. We are very pleased with the outcomes and feel they reflect the hard work that goes on daily in our school.

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 a Board we have taken account of the recommendations made
An Action Plan has been devised by the staff addressing all recommendations and a timeframe in which to implement same. This Action Plan will form part of our School Improvement Plan for next year.