An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Jonathan Swift National School
Dunlavin, County Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 14269A

Date of inspection: 14 September 2010
1. Introduction

Jonathan Swift National School is a two-teacher, co-educational vertical primary school in the parish of Donoughmore, Dunlavin and Donard. It is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. There are currently 36 pupils enrolled. Enrolment figures have increased steadily in recent years and overall attendance levels are very good. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The board of management works in a conscientious manner and is clearly committed to the ongoing development of the school.
- The principal demonstrates effective and purposeful leadership. The principal and staff are commended for the successful promotion of a culture of teamwork and collaboration.
- The management of pupils is very good. A supportive, familial atmosphere is cultivated effectively.
- The overall standard of teaching and learning in the curriculum areas evaluated is high.
- The parents’ association and parents generally provide praiseworthy support for the work of the school.

The following main recommendations are made:

- Action plans should be developed and implemented to address agreed whole-school curriculum and organisational priorities. This will support the establishment of greater linkages between individual classroom planning, the school plan and the primary curriculum.
- Sa Ghaeilge, moltar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí a fheabhsú. In the teaching of Irish, it is recommended that the pupils’ oral-language abilities be improved.
- Existing assessment practices should be augmented to include agreed modes of continuous assessment across all curriculum areas.
- In revisiting the special education policy to ensure formal adoption of Department Circular 02/05, the use of a comprehensive range of diagnostic tools in the identification and review of specific targets for individual pupils should be included, in addition to documentation of current practice.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is constituted properly and discharges its duties in a conscientious manner. It is clearly commitment to the ongoing development of the school.
Positive and productive relationships between the board and school staff, parents and the local community are reported. This was substantiated by the affirmative interactions in evidence during the period of the evaluation.

- The principal provides effective and purposeful leadership. The quality of teaching and learning and the holistic development of each child in a happy school environment are central to her vision. She is ably assisted by the special-duties teacher. The principal and staff are commended for the successful promotion of a culture of teamwork and collaboration. As reflective practitioners they regularly review and modify provision in response to the changing needs of the pupils.

- A good variety of resources, including information and communication technology, is provided and utilised appropriately to support teaching. The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a high standard and provide a safe and stimulating environment.

- The parents’ association, parents generally and the local community provide commendable support for the work of the school. Parents are invited to share of their individual talents to enhance the implementation of the curriculum. The parents’ association organises a variety of school functions and through its fundraising activities provides the school with a range of resources.

- The management of pupils is very good. A supportive, familial atmosphere is cultivated effectively. The high quality relationships between the pupils, their sense of pride and feelings of safety in school are reflected in the positive responses to pupil questionnaires.

4. **Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- Overall, the quality of school planning and school self-evaluation is good. The board is involved in the development of the school plan. In accordance with effective practice, curriculum plans and organisational policies are discussed, amended as necessary and ratified at board meetings. Parents are consulted in relation to administrative policies.

- A strategic plan, outlining a range of curriculum and organisational priorities, has been formulated and all plans and policies are reviewed on a cyclical basis. The results of standardised tests in English and Mathematics are used purposefully to track the progress of pupils from first to sixth classes, to assist in the identification of pupils in need of additional support and to monitor overall school standards. To ensure the identification of specific, measurable, attainable and realistic targets in addressing school priorities, it is recommended that an action planning approach be implemented.

- Curriculum plans provide general assistance to guide teaching and learning. In the current review of provision for oral language in English, the identification of discrete learning targets, so as to ensure the spiral progression of the pupils’ learning, is planned. In the cyclical review of curriculum plans, it is advised that this clarity of curriculum content be extended to all subject areas.

- The establishment of greater linkage between individual classroom planning, the school plan and the primary curriculum is recommended. It is also advised that short-term planning focuses more particularly on the intended learning outcomes for pupils and their skill development.
Child protection policy and procedures

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 múineadh na Gaeilge sa scoil ar chaighdeán maith. Úsáidtear rainn, amhráin agus drámaíocht go hóifeachtaí chun suim agus tuiscint na ndaltaí a chothú. Baintear feidhm as fearas oiriúnach agus as stráitéis éagsúla chun foclóir na ndaltaí a leathnú agus chun a gcumas cumarsáide a fháil. Tá stórfhocal breá leathan an eolais ag na daltaí agus éirionn le cuid diobh ceisteanna simplí a chur agus a fhreagairt. Moltar an scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí a theagmháil agus a dhéanann níos rialta a thabhairt dóibh páirt a thabhairt do chuid díobh.
- B'a dearcadh i bhfoirm ann le trí mhí, agus tógann an scileanna scribhneoireachta go dicheallach agus deirifeanta níos rialta a d'fhágadh a bhí ar fáil.

The teaching of Irish in the school is good. Poems, songs and Drama are used effectively to foster the pupils’ interest and understanding. Appropriate resources and a range of approaches are employed to broaden the pupils’ vocabulary and to develop their communication skills. The pupils demonstrate a wide vocabulary range and some of them are capable of asking and answering simple questions. It is recommended that the pupils’ oral language abilities be improved and more regular opportunities should be provided for their participation in authentic communication activities. It is advised that pupils be provided with greater opportunities to practise the newly introduced phrases and to further develop their competence to use verbs correctly in their spoken language. Reading activities are based on the textbooks and a range of supplementary readers. The majority of the pupils achieve good reading standards. Writing skills are taught diligently and appropriate standards are in evidence.

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Admirable attention is placed on promoting the pupils’ reading skills. Their phonological and phonemic awareness are fostered purposefully and good use is made of a broad variety of reading material. The pupils read fluently and with understanding in accordance with their ability. In the main, the pupils communicate with confidence and competence. They would benefit from additional opportunities to enhance their expressive language abilities through engagement with the views and perspectives of others. The pupils’ handwriting and presentation skills are well developed and a process approach to writing is fostered. It is advised that a more structured approach to drafting, editing and redrafting across the breadth of writing genres be implemented on a whole-school basis. This should include an enhanced role for pupils and their peers.

- In Mathematics, high-quality teaching is in evidence. Concepts are explained clearly, resources are employed appropriately and the pupils’ oral mathematical abilities are promoted purposefully. The pupils engage in lessons with interest and confidence. They demonstrate laudable understanding of work previously undertaken across the strands of the curriculum. This is reflected in their positive responses in relation to their
mathematical abilities in the pupil questionnaires. As a means of enhancing the pupils' capacity to apply their knowledge and understanding, further promotion of their abilities to independently generate and to use a variety of strategies to solve mathematical problems is advised.

• In Drama, the full participation of pupils is encouraged and facilitated through the creation of a safe environment. Strategies, including mime and teacher-in-role, are used effectively. The pupils engage in activities with confidence and enthusiasm. In recent years an external Drama teacher has played a primary role in the implementation of the Drama curriculum. School concerts provide opportunities for pupils to engage in many aspects of the performance element of Drama. Following the recent review of the Drama policy, it is important to ensure that a broad and balanced programme of work is implemented. This should include an additional focus on all the elements of Drama.

• Overall, the standard of teaching and learning in the school is of a high quality. Lessons are well-structured with effective use being made of opportunities for integration of subject areas across the curriculum. Positive learning environments are created effectively. A number of teaching and learning methodologies are employed and many children reported that they often use computers in school. A range of assessment approaches, including some effective pupil self-assessment practices, is used to monitor pupil achievement. Evidence from the pupils' questionnaires demonstrates that homework is corrected regularly and guidance is given to pupils on how to improve their work. It is recommended that existing assessment practices be augmented to include agreed modes of continuous assessment across all curriculum areas. It is also advised that assessment results be used more systematically to inform teaching and learning for the varying ability levels of all pupils.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

• The collaborative approach to support for pupils with special educational needs is lauded. Effective and positive communication structures exist between school staff and parents.

• Competent practice is evident in the provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Lessons are well structured and teacher/pupil interactions are supportive. Positive pupil progress is in evidence, including the development of their self-confidence.

• Individual profile and learning programmes are generally constructed appropriately and are reviewed regularly involving appropriate consultation with class teachers and parents.

• Notwithstanding the good practice outlined above, it is recommended that the special educational needs policy be reviewed. This review should include formal adoption of a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning as outlined in departmental circular 02/05, the use of a comprehensive range of diagnostic tools in the identification and review of specific targets for individual pupils and documentation of current practice. The proposed formulation of a policy on supporting the more able pupils is noted and welcomed.

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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

We found the WSE to be a positive and encouraging experience.

The BOM, staff and parents appreciated the professional nature of the process as carried out by the inspector.

We felt that our input was well regarded and considered.

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

- The learning support policy is being reviewed and renewed at present. We have applied to the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) for any assistance available.

- While we feel Oral Irish is a strength in the school we will promote it more strongly, especially questioning.

- We are developing a mode of continuous assessment across all curricular areas – a checklist of skills attained.

- Greater attention will be paid to the linkage between individual classroom planning, the school plan and the primary curriculum.