

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St. Brigid's Primary School
Haddington Road, Dublin 4
Uimhir rolla: 16567S

Date of inspection: 17 October 2011



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

1. Introduction

St. Brigid's Primary School, Dublin 4, operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The infant classes are co-educational, with girls only from 1st to 6th classes. The school participates in the Department's DEIS (Band 2) programme. Though under Catholic patronage, this is very much a multi-cultural school with pupils from over 40 countries enrolled.

Attendance levels are somewhat problematic. Though there is a positively stated and implemented attendance policy in effect in the school, approximately one fifth of all pupils are absent for more than 20 days per year with a further quarter of all pupils being absent between 10 and 20 days per year. Some, though not all, of these absences are explained by newcomer families taking extended holiday periods in their home countries. It is recommended that the school prioritises this issue and looks to other community responses to problematic attendance levels to inform its own strategy. 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 quality of leadership and management at all levels in the school is excellent.
- The atmosphere in the school is highly conducive to the delivery of quality teaching and very good learning outcomes.
- The quality of planning at whole-school and at individual teacher levels is excellent.
- The overall quality of teaching in St. Brigid's Primary School is excellent.
- Assessment practices in the school are meaningful and impact positively on teaching and improved learning outcomes.
- Staff members are highly committed to the school, to the pupils and to their holistic development.
- The pupils' behaviour and engagement with learning activities is excellent.
- The school is highly successful in developing a love of learning among the pupils.

The following **main recommendation** is made:

- School personnel, in conjunction with the parent body, should seek to improve attendance rates among pupils.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is excellent. Board members are very committed to the school, aware of its strengths and of the challenges it faces. The members are highly focused on providing the best possible education experience for the

- pupils in the school. The fact that the school provides a very broad range of activities for pupils, both during and after school, at no cost to parents is significant.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is excellent. A strategic thinker who is highly organised, the principal offers exceptional instructional leadership and is supported very capably by the in-school management team. The expectation levels set for the pupils by all teachers are commendably high. Excellent communications, teamwork and innovative practices at all levels are among the key strengths of the school. There is a very clear focus on the consistent delivery of the curriculum and the standard of learning outcomes is high. Each aspect of the work of the in-school management team is focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
 - The management of resources is of a very high standard. The range of resources available to teachers is very impressive and the manner in which they are stored, used and replenished is highly professional. Considerable work has gone into ensuring that the classrooms and corridors are well presented.
 - The quality of the management of pupils is excellent. This is due to the high quality of teaching and of the programmes on offer, the very respectful manner in which teachers and pupils interact and the implementation of a very good policy which governs pupil behaviour. These combine to ensure the development of the pupils' sense of self confidence. There is a strong sense in the school of pupils who have developed a genuine love of learning. The work of the principal, teachers and school community in that regard is highly commendable.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of the school planning and school self-evaluation process is excellent. Planning is regarded as being highly important in the school. The process involved in producing high quality organisational and curriculum plans is very collaborative and focused on school improvement. Planning practices in the school are consistent, cohesive and extremely well focused. Whole school plans and policies have a definite and positive impact on how teachers teach and are very much focused on the identified needs of the school. An excellent example of this is the adoption of a whole-school approach to the teaching of problem solving in Mathematics. Teachers constantly review their practices and this has a meaningful impact on the quality of teaching.
- Teachers plan their individual programmes very successfully from the curriculum. Very good collaboration is evident in this process and planning informs teaching effectively in each of the classrooms.
- 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

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is excellent. The teachers are very clear as to the objectives of their lessons, place great emphasis on differentiation and manage to teach each of the subjects in an in-depth manner. Concepts are explained with great clarity. Very good use of co-teaching is evident and there is a very good balance struck between teacher inputs and pupil learning. Teachers work in a diligent, professional and self-confident manner.
- The quality of learning outcomes in the school is very good. Outcomes in numeracy are particularly impressive and outcomes in literacy are steadily improving. The pupils engage very well in the learning activities provided. Innovative practices such as the recent introduction of a self-assessment tool are welcome and will add to the overall effectiveness of the school.
- Tá múineadh na Gaeilge ar chaighdeán an-mhaith. Tá láithreacht maith don teanga sa scoil agus múintear gach ceacht trí mheán na Gaeilge amháin. Léiríonn na daltaí bród as a gcuid cumais sa Ghaeilge. Déantar na rudaí bunúsacha, druileanna agus litriú ina measc, go han-mhaith. Tá foclóir an-leathan foghlamtha ag na daltaí agus tugtar deiseanna oiriúnacha dóibh é a chleachtadh trí úsáid a bhaint as cluichí teanga, as grúpobair agus as obair bheirte. Bunann na daltaí cuid mhaith dá gcuid scríbhneoireachta ar an bhfoclóir sin. Tá caighdeán na léitheoireachta go maith.

The teaching of Irish is very good. There is a good presence for the language in the school and each lesson is taught entirely through Irish. The pupils display a sense of pride in their ability to use Irish. The basics, including drills and spellings are done very well. The pupils have learned a wide vocabulary and suitable opportunities are given to them to practice this through the use of language games, group work and pair work. The pupils make good use of this vocabulary when writing. The standard of reading is good.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is excellent. High quality assessment and planning practices underpin a very systematic approach to the development of reading in the school. There is an excellent foundation for literacy in junior classrooms where there are very good links with the home. Pupils engage very well in assigned tasks. Exceptionally high standards in writing were observed in many of the classrooms. The pupils' oral competence is very good; this being supported by the teachers' effective modelling of language. The approach to developing the pupils' comprehension and higher order thinking skills is very good. Very strong emphasis is placed on poetry.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a very high quality. In their questionnaire responses, pupils indicated that they experienced a good sense of achievement in Mathematics. Highly specific planning informs practice in this subject. The approach to the teaching of Mathematics is consistent at all levels in the school. There is very good emphasis on relating class work to the pupils' environment, the provision of differentiated programmes and the use of ICTs. Oral work is taught effectively and achievement levels are very high. The language of Mathematics is pre-taught very effectively. There is very good emphasis on skill development throughout the school. School-wide initiatives, such as 'Maths Week' support the pupils in their learning.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Music is excellent. Best use is made of the individual teacher strengths in delivering a high quality music programme. Very significant emphasis is placed on pupil participation in an extensive after-school music programme. Pupils develop appropriate literacy skills in Music as they progress

through the school. They are also taught to engage in simple composition exercises. The repertoire of songs taught and performed in English and Irish is broad and stimulating for the pupils. In that regard, some consideration could be given to developing the intercultural experience of the pupils by teaching a number of songs in the pupils' home languages. Teachers are also advised to always give a starting note before singing.

- Assessment practices in the school are excellent. There is a significant focus on early intervention and testing of pupil achievement takes place regularly throughout the school. The results of tests are used to inform practice in classrooms and in support rooms. Standardised and diagnostic tests are carried out with very good efficiency in the school.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of teaching, the use of innovative methods such as co-teaching and a sense that every child's experience of the school is important means that pupils are very well supported in St. Brigid's Primary School. The school responds very well to all pupils' needs and abilities. Where appropriate, Individual Education Plans and Group Education Plans are drawn up to assist the teachers in delivering focused interventions. The resources used to provide for pupils are excellent. The manner in which the school provides specific support ensures that each teacher in the school is very aware of what is being taught in classrooms and, more importantly, the standards achieved by pupils in these settings.
- Initiatives such as Family Night and the very broad range of activities pursued in the school enhance the quality of the pupils' learning experiences. In questionnaires, every pupil and almost all of the parents rated the school as being good.

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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

On behalf of the school community of St. Brigid's Primary School, the BOM acknowledges the professional and courteous manner in which the evaluation was undertaken. We welcome the report, highlighting as it does the excellent standards of teaching, learning, management and planning in St. Brigid's.

We especially appreciate the inspectorate's findings in relation to high standards in the subjects, namely Maths, English, Irish and Music. We note with particular pride that the inspectorate recognised our outcomes in Maths as 'particularly impressive' and that the quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is 'excellent'. We wholeheartedly endorse the report's observation of our pupils' genuine love of learning.

The BOM wishes to thank all of the partners involved in making St. Brigid's a vibrant, dynamic learning environment. The ongoing dedication of our staff and their commitment to the holistic development of our pupils is recognised and much appreciated. We also recognise the manner in which parents positively engage with their children's education is a key element in our success.

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 BOM recognises the importance of regular school attendance for all pupils and will continue to work with parents to ensure that absences are kept to a minimum.