

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**St Mary's Convent Primary School,  
Trim, Co. Meath  
Uimhir rolla: 166460**

**Date of inspection: 3 October 2013**



## 1. Introduction

St Mary's Convent Primary School Trim is a vertical school under the patronage of the Bishop of Meath. It is co-educational up to first class and girls only from second to sixth class. The school's mission statement strongly echoes the philosophy of its founders, the Mercy Sisters, and places a strong emphasis on the holistic development of each pupil. Attendance rates for the 616 pupils are generally good. Nonetheless, the school is advised to develop further strategies to promote attendance. During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in eleven mainstream class settings and six support teaching settings. The board of management of the school 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:

- The board of management and parent body effectively support the work of the school.
- The school is very well resourced and provides a stimulating learning environment.
- The principal and teachers are highly committed to their work and a culture of teamwork is evident.
- A positive learning atmosphere is fostered and pupils are very well behaved.
- The school has developed highly effective communication systems.
- Approaches to the use of in-class support and team teaching are highly commendable.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- A wider range of teaching approaches and methodologies should be implemented to involve pupils to a greater degree as active agents in their own learning and to focus on skills development.
- Teachers should further differentiate learning programmes to ensure appropriate support and sufficient challenge for pupils.
- A progressive and incremental approach should be introduced to the investigation of the school's local historical environment.
- It is strongly recommended that the board reviews the school's enrolment policy.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The board of management provides effective governance for the school. Members are kept well informed on school activities through the principal's report. The board is commended for the manner in which the building and grounds are maintained. School finances are carefully managed. The development and ratification of policies is central to the work of the board. It is strongly recommended that the board revise the school's enrolment policy to remove clauses around the right to defer the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs pending the provision of resources, to refuse the enrolment of children with moderate general learning disabilities and to review the enrolments of pupils with special educational needs as circumstances demand.
- The principal is committed to developing a happy school community. He exhibits good interpersonal skills and leads school administration processes effectively. The deputy principal and in-school management team capably support the work of the principal through the fulfilment of a broad range of duties. Commendably, these duties are reviewed regularly and achievements are communicated to the board of management.
- The school is very well resourced and provides a stimulating learning environment. The library and computer facilities are excellent. A spirit of teamwork and commitment is evident among all staff. Special needs assistants and ancillary staff contribute considerably to the operation of the school.
- Relationships with the school community are managed very successfully. The school communicates regularly with parents through a wide range of media. The parents' association is very active and parents provide valuable support to the school. In questionnaires and meetings, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the operation of the school.
- The management of pupils is of a very high quality. A positive learning atmosphere is evident and pupil behaviour is commendable. Pupils' involvement in the student council, charitable events and green school initiatives cultivates their leadership and decision-making skills. The vast majority of pupils indicate in questionnaires that they are having a very positive experience in school. A wide variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities supports pupils' holistic development.

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

- Whole-school planning is of a high quality and is developed collaboratively. A comprehensive suite of organisational policies inform the efficient operation of the school. Curriculum plans are generally of a good quality, particularly the English and Mathematics plans. A plan for the Visual Arts should be developed and other plans should be further contextualised to the needs of the school.
- The school has engaged in self-evaluation processes in both literacy and numeracy. An initial school self-evaluation report submitted to the board of management has been informed by good use of school assessment data.
- On the whole, teachers are making good progress in adopting the recently introduced whole-school approach to curriculum-informed, objective-led planning. Teachers are advised to continue refining this approach and to record specific detail on provision for differentiation for pupils in need of support and challenge. Long-term planning is of a good quality.

- 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

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good. Teachers model language precisely and explain new concepts clearly. While some pair work and group work was observed, the use of a broader range of methodologies is recommended to ensure that pupils are active agents in their learning and have sustained opportunities to interact with peers and discuss their learning. Overall, provision for differentiation should be developed to ensure appropriate support or sufficient challenge for pupils in their learning, particularly in English and Mathematics. Written work is presented to a very high standard and is regularly monitored. Pupils engage well in their learning activities and a large majority reported that they enjoy their lessons and learning.
- Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach i leith na Gaeilge agus, ar an mórgóir, tá caighdeán maith á bhaint amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Úsáideann oidí raon modhanna múinte cuí agus acmhainní éifeachtacha chun an teanga a mhúineadh. Baintear na torthaí foghlama is fearr amach i ranganna ina mhúintear sprioc-teanga nua sainiúil agus ina dtugtar dóthain deiseanna cainte do dhaltai a gcuid muiníne sa teanga labhartha a fhorbairt. Léann formhór na ndaltaí le muinín ó na téacsleabhair agus d'fhéadfaí taithí níos leithne a thabhairt dóibh ar chineálacha difriúla téacsanna. Sonraítear roinnt dea-scríbhneoireachta sna cóipleabhair agus ar taispeáint sna seomraí ranga. Déantar soláthar maith de rannta, d'fhilíocht agus d'amhránaíocht ar fud na scoile.
- *A positive attitude to Irish is nurtured and on the whole, a good standard is achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. Teachers use appropriate methodologies and effective resources to teach the language. The best learning outcomes are attained in classes where specific new target language is taught and when sufficient speaking opportunities are given to pupils to develop their confidence in the spoken language. The majority of pupils read confidently from textbooks and they could be provided with a wider variety of different types of text. Some good written work was observed in copybooks and displayed in classrooms. Good provision is made for rhymes, poetry and singing throughout the school.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is commendable. In the infant classes, emergent literacy skills are nurtured effectively. Pupils are provided with ongoing opportunities to respond to poetry in a variety of ways. A culture of reading is promoted and a large number of pupils achieve very good results in standardised reading tests. Good attention is paid to developing pupils' writing skills. To build on good practice, incremental whole-school approaches to the teaching of comprehension skills, guided reading and writing genres should be implemented.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a high quality. A suitable emphasis is placed on oral activities and on the language of mathematics. Overall, concepts are clearly explained and good use is made of concrete resources. Greater provision for pupil discussion during lessons and increased challenge for high achievers is advised. On the whole, pupils display flexibility and confidence in their mental skills and apply problem-solving strategies effectively.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is good. Pupils' understanding of their personal and family history is well developed. Some opportunities

to engage with evidence are provided and good work was observed on the use of story. A greater emphasis should be placed on developing pupils' skills to work as historians. While some aspects of the rich local historical environment have been explored, it is recommended that the school plans a progressive and incremental approach to its investigation.

- There are effective assessment practices in the school. A broad range of tests is administered and good analysis and tracking are undertaken. The current practice of administering standardised tests to some classes twice in the academic year should be reviewed. High-quality baseline assessment data is gathered in the infant classes. The transfer and sharing of assessment data in the school is commendable. All teachers have developed good quality formative assessment records, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Going forward, teachers are advised to make greater use of this data to inform differentiation and to widen assessment practices to other aspects of the curriculum.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- Overall provision for pupils with special educational needs is good, with very good practice observed in some settings. In almost all support settings, very good individual plans and effective short-term planning have been prepared to inform practice. More specific planning for pupils who have English as an additional language is advised in some settings. A variety of methods is used for the delivery of support in line with pupils' needs. Planning for and use of station teaching as an early intervention strategy in the infant classes is highly praised. Teaching and learning observed was characterised by affirming teacher-pupil relationships and, overall, was well structured to meet pupils' learning needs. Pupils' progress in the achievement of targets is generally well recorded. The staged approach is implemented effectively throughout the school.
- Provision for pupils in the special class is of a high quality. A good emphasis is placed on developing pupils' physical motor skills, social mathematics and functional literacy. Going forward, all pupils should receive the full breadth of the curriculum in a discrete or integrated way. There is very good provision for pupils in the specific speech and language class. Language is carefully modelled and high quality pupil interactions foster systematic language development.

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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 was pleased to note that the report recognised the quality of teaching and learning in our school, the positive learning atmosphere and the high quality collaboration and planning of the management, staff, parents and pupils in our school.

The school community found the process to be a very positive and affirming experience, as evidenced in the report. The Board welcomes the overwhelmingly positive feedback received from parents and children during this process.

We also wish to take this opportunity to thank the whole staff for their ongoing hard work and commitment in striving to provide high quality learning opportunities to our pupils.

In reference to the recommendations regarding our enrolment policy, the board had adopted the current policy after legal consultation and being mindful of our obligations under Section 9 of the Education Act 1998 to provide all pupils with an education to meet their needs.

### **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 Board of Management and staff have noted the recommendations and they will be addressed within the context of our school self-evaluation planning going forward.

In relation to our enrolment policy, the Board will review this policy, in light of the WSE recommendations, at its next meeting.

After robust debate, by the staff, they have decided to administer standardised tests once a year, as advised.