

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

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St. Columba's NS,
Iona Road, Glasnevin, Dublin 9.**

Uimhir rolla: 16659A

Date of inspection: 16 December 2010



1. Introduction

St. Columba's National School caters for both boys and girls in junior and senior infants and for girls only from first class to sixth class. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. Currently, there are 381 pupils enrolled in the school. Attendance levels are very satisfactory. 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:

- The principal and in-school management team provide purposeful leadership for the school.
- The school is managed by an effective board of management.
- A warm, nurturing school climate exists where pupils are encouraged to do their best and where the individuality of each pupil is respected.
- The school is presented in an organised and aesthetically pleasing manner.
- Clear and focused whole-school plans are in place.
- The school has compiled a comprehensive selection of resources to support the delivery of the curriculum.
- Teachers make very good use of a variety of teaching methods which serve to create engaging and stimulating lessons.
- The management of pupils is of a very high standard: pupils reveal pride and interest in their work which is completed to a high standard.
- Support for pupils with additional learning needs is delivered in an organised, stimulating and affirming manner.
- Very good standards in English and Visual Arts were noted during the evaluation.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that a more uniform whole-school approach to the use of monthly progress reports be established.
- It is recommended that the school further extend its use of in-class support for pupils with additional learning needs.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management operates in an effective manner. Duties have been assigned appropriately. Detailed minutes of each board meeting are recorded and school accounts are audited every year. The board concerns itself with a range of tasks which include the management of resources, the employment of staff and the review and ratification of school policies. As the original school building was constructed in 1925, a significant amount of the board's time is spent on matters concerning the maintenance and upgrading of the building in order to provide a pleasant learning environment for pupils.
- The school has built up a very good stock of teaching and learning resources. In particular, the school's library, book rental scheme, garden, language resources and

mathematics equipment are of noteworthy mention. In recent times the school has made very good progress in reviewing and upgrading its information and communication technology (ICT) resources. Teachers make very creative use of ICT to present lesson content. Teaching staff are currently participating in a range of professional development courses.

- The management of pupils is of a very high standard. Teachers interact with pupils in a respectful and affirming manner. Pupils are very cooperative and courteous, with notably pleasant and polite exchanges being observed during the evaluation. Pupils' questionnaire responses indicate that a very high proportion of them 'feel safe in their classrooms and in the playground'.
- The in-school management team is a cohesive and dynamic group. It is led by a committed and perceptive principal who actively monitors and encourages the continuous development of a vibrant learning environment. The in-school management team meets regularly and duties are periodically reviewed. Such reviews involve the assignment of curriculum leadership roles and the appropriate development of shared curriculum leadership initiatives.
- The school has established very effective modes of communication with parents including the regular use of newsletters, a school website and text-a-parent service. Formal parent-teacher meetings are held annually and written reports are also sent to parents once a year. While the results of standardised tests are provided orally to parents, it is recommended that the school make provision for the written reporting of such results.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Policies are in place for all curriculum areas. In a number of cases, very useful and succinct overviews of curriculum content have been constructed. It is recommended that the school's code of behaviour be reviewed, paying specific attention to procedures for suspension and expulsion.
- All teachers write long and short-term plans that are clear and specific. In particular, long-term plans are focused on the sequential development of content and on the provision of active, stimulating learning experiences. Teachers are commended for their creative preparation of resources to scaffold pupils' learning. While all teachers provide monthly progress reports, it is recommended that the school examine a more uniform whole-school approach to the recording of work completed in individual classrooms.

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

- Leagtar béim inmholta sa phlean scoile ar shuim, ar shaibhreas teanga agus ar chumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Tugtar samplaí deasa sa phlean de nathanna cainte, píosaí filíochta agus amhráin a bheadh oiriúnach do gach rang. Sna ranganna go léir, léiríonn na daltaí dul chun cinn creidiúnach i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge, go háirithe maidir le sealbhú foclóra agus nathanna cainte de. Úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar theanga chumarsáide go leanúnach le linn na gceachtanna. Glacann na daltaí páirt ghníomhach 'sna himeachtaí agus baineann siad taitneamh as na cluichí cainte, drámaí beaga agus as na hábhair bhreátha léirithe a chuireann na hoidí fáil. Tá tuiscint mhaith ag formhór na ndaltaí ar ábhar na gceachtanna atá foghlamtha.
- Sna meán ranganna agus sna hard ranganna, tá caighdeán creidiúnach le sonrú ag formhór na ndaltaí sa léitheoireacht agus sa scríbhneoireacht. Tá an scoil ullmhaithe mar thimpeallacht saibhir prionta sa Ghaeilge. Baintear leas as sraith leabhar oibre mar bhunús do thascanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta. Tá saothar na ndaltaí sna cóipleabhair ar chaighdeán ard agus déanann na hoidí monatóireacht chuí ar an obair scríofa. I gcuid de na ranganna tugtar deiseanna do dhaltáí scríbhneoireacht a dhéanamh i raon leathan seánraí. B'fhiú an dea-chleachtas seo a fhorleathnú sa scoil. Moltar freisin réimse níos leithne d'ábhar léitheoireachta a úsáid.

Irish

The school plan places commendable emphasis on the development of the pupils' interest, communication abilities and language enrichment. Suitable samples of expressions, poetry and songs appropriate to each class are provided in the plan. In all classes, pupils show creditable progress in the learning of Irish, particularly in relation to the acquisition of vocabulary and Irish phrases. Irish is used continuously as a language of communication throughout lessons. Pupils participate fully in Irish activities and they enjoy the language games, small dramas and the materials that teachers provide to illustrate lessons. The majority of pupils have a good understanding of the content of lessons they have learned.

In the middle and senior classes, the majority of pupils have reached a creditable standard in reading and writing. The school is presented as a print-rich environment in Irish. A range of workbooks is used as the basis for reading and writing tasks. The pupils' work in their copybooks is of a high standard and teachers monitor this written work appropriately. In some classes, pupils are given opportunities to write in a wide range of genres. It would be worthwhile to extend this good practice throughout the school. It is also recommended that wider ranges of reading material be used.

- The English language programme is very well structured and includes provision for the systematic development of pupils' skills in oral language, reading and writing. Resources are used creatively to stimulate pupils to discuss a variety of topics relevant to their age and ability levels. In some classes, very good use is made of pair work and small group work. More frequent use of such approaches in other classes is recommended. Pupils learn a varied repertoire of rhymes and poems, and poetry is used effectively as a stimulus for oral discussion and written work.
- The school's reading programme is very well planned and resourced. Classroom and school libraries are well organised and include a broad selection of books. The reading programme in use in infant classes is differentiated appropriately and reading material is matched closely to pupils' ability levels. Structured provision is made for the development of phonological awareness. Team teaching by mainstream and support teachers is well organised and allows activities such as shared reading to be used effectively. Very good provision is in place for the development of pupils' writing skills and pupils write in a

variety of genres with increasing sophistication as they progress through the school. Judicious attention is given to the systematic development of handwriting skills.

- Mathematics lessons are delivered in a lively, stimulating manner. Teachers place good emphasis on the use of hands-on activities and concrete resources, with effective use of co-operative learning being a strong feature of the work. Pupils show very good knowledge of number facts. Some teachers make good provision for pupils' questions during lessons and there is potential for giving pupils more opportunities to ask questions and to interrogate concepts.
- Through the use of a maths-week, buddy maths initiatives and the presentation of the school environment in a maths-rich manner, the school actively seeks to promote Mathematics. Suitable provision is in place for problem solving and, in some instances, teachers encourage pupils to create their own problems. Pupils' questionnaire responses indicate that there is scope for developing their self-concepts in Mathematics and for the development of approaches to self-assessment.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Visual Arts is of a high standard. School corridors and classrooms are beautifully adorned with high quality displays and samples of pupils' work across all curricular strands. Visual Arts teaching is creative and stimulating, with notable provision for integration with a range of other subjects. Lessons make very good use of discussion, ICT, cooperative learning, visual and aural stimuli and hands-on activities. Pupils clearly enjoy these lessons and are active in exploring, experimenting and expressing themselves through art.
- In the four curriculum areas evaluated, the overall quality of teaching and learning was very good. Teachers prepare carefully and creatively for lessons which are delivered in a lively and engaging manner. Suitable teaching methods are used and are supported by the effective use of resources. The quality of pupils' work is very good. Data from parents' questionnaires indicate that a very high proportion of them think that their child is doing well in school.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The quality of support for pupils with additional learning needs in this school is very good. The support team comprises two learning-support teachers, a part-time resource teacher and two teachers for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). This team works in a concerted, purposeful manner, seeking to identify and meet the needs of pupils as early as possible. Teacher planning is clear and strategic, with well-thought out individual and group learning programmes being devised. Pupils are selected for support through the use of systematic and careful testing. Teachers carefully monitor pupils' progress and liaise effectively with parents.
- Teachers make every effort to deliver support in a stimulating and affirming manner. The school has built up a wide range of resources and places strong emphasis on the active involvement of pupils. In the delivery of support, the team makes use of in-class, withdrawal and one-to-one support methods. In building on current good practice, it is recommended that the school examine wider opportunities for the use of in-class support.

Published October 2011

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 St Columba's School would like to thank the inspectors of the DES for their courtesy and the professional manner in which they conducted the Whole School Evaluation in December 2010.

The Board is very pleased that this report affirms the dedication, hard work and commitment of the staff and the wider school community.

We welcome the recognition that the school is functioning very effectively and that the quality of school planning is clear and focused. Our planning has evolved over a number of years and reflects the many hours of collaboration invested by staff during this time.

We are particularly pleased that the report recognised our warm, nurturing school climate, that the quality of teaching is high and that our pupils have pride and interest in their learning.

The Board congratulates the principal and all members of staff and also commends the members of the Parents' Association for their continued work and support.

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 inspectors' recommendations were constructive. Since our WSE, we have implemented some of these recommendations.

- We reported standardised test results in writing to parents this summer.
- We have reviewed our Code of Behaviour.

We will continue to implement the other recommendations during this academic year.