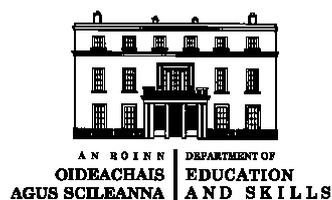


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Cushinstown NS
Cushinstown, Co Wexford
Uimhir rolla: 16673R

Date of inspection: 6 March 2014



1. Introduction

Cushinstown NS is a co-educational, vertical primary school with one class for pupils with autism which was opened in 2008. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Ferns. There has been a strong increase in enrolment over the last number of years. The attendance of the 240 pupils enrolled is generally good. However, a significant number of pupils are absent for more than 20 days each year. 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:

- Cushinstown NS is characterised by a sense of community and inclusiveness; the welcoming school atmosphere and the positive interactions between, staff, pupils and parents are commendable.
- The commitment of the chairperson and the board of management to the work and development of the school is praised.
- The principal promotes a culture of collaboration and the staff team demonstrate professionalism in their work and commitment to the development of the school.
- The pupils are well behaved and are commended for their interest and enthusiasm in learning.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement is good.
- Parents are actively supportive of the development of the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The duties of the in-school management team should be reviewed in light of the changing priorities of the school and systems for on-going planning and development should be put in place.
- School development planning processes should be enhanced to include all staff; a collaborative team and an action-planning approach should be adopted to progress identified priorities in specific curriculum areas.
- To enhance the learning experiences of the pupils, more extensive use of active-learning methodologies, co-operative group tasks, and scaffolded and differentiated learning opportunities is advised.

3. Quality of School Management

- The work and commitment of the board of management and its chairperson to the development of the school is commended. The board is properly constituted and members are conscientious in carrying out a range of duties on behalf of the school community. Board members have organised substantial fund-raising events to support the development of the school's resources. Building on this good work, the role of the board in school policy development and review should be strengthened.
- The principal demonstrates an on-going and high level of commitment to the school and has overseen significant growth and development over many years. She successfully promotes a positive school climate, good working relationships and attends effectively to the organisation and management of the school. She is supported by the in-school management team, whose work assists in the good operation of the school. In the questionnaires most parents agree that the school is well run. While duties have been assigned to each teacher with a post of responsibility, these have not been renewed for some time. To reflect the changing needs of the school, specific duties attached to posts of responsibility should be reviewed annually. Regular planning meetings and related activities should be scheduled by the in-school management team to support its work and development. The preparation of a report to the board on the work undertaken by the team each year should also be considered.
- The school is characterised by a sense of community and inclusiveness. Good relationships and communication with the school community are in evidence. The parents' association, parent body and local community are very supportive of the work of the school. The parents' association engages in a range of activities, including fund-raising and is commended for its work on behalf of the school. Parent questionnaires indicate that parents feel welcome in the school. The high quality of administrative and secretarial support facilitates good communication across the school community. Consideration should now be given to extending the involvement of parents in relevant policy areas and in classroom activities, where practicable.
- Over a number of years the school has developed good facilities and resources and these are well managed. The school buildings, classrooms and grounds are maintained to a good standard and attractively presented and staff members are commended in this regard. A wide range of resources is available in classrooms. The questionnaires indicate that most parents regard facilities as good and that a safe environment is provided for their child. While significant advances have been made in information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching resource, opportunities for pupils' access to and use of ICT in the classroom context should be further explored and developed.
- Good management of the pupils and an atmosphere of mutual respect are in evidence across the school. The pupils are well-behaved and their interest and enthusiasm in learning were noted. The good quality relationships and positive experiences in school are reflected in the positive responses to pupil questionnaires. The establishment of a pupils' council would provide a framework in which the role of the pupils' voice in the life of the school could be further enhanced. Putting a pupils' group in place in relation to the Green School programme can be a starting point and it is recommended that this be actively considered.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- School planning is undertaken in the organisational, curricular and pastoral areas and a useful range of documents has been produced. Work is on-going in this area and the

school's planning processes should now be further developed and arrangements for the systematic review and development of policies should be put in place. The collaborative approach to planning, already in evidence in aspects of the school's work, should be strengthened, through the adoption of strategies such as action planning.

- In the curriculum areas, whole school planning should provide guidance and support for teaching and learning through the school and across the range of abilities. Individual classroom planning is of a good quality. Monthly reports are completed and maintained. Good co-operation in relation to planning is in evidence between classroom teachers and the teachers supporting pupils with special educational needs. The school has engaged productively with school self-evaluation processes, focussing on the areas of literacy and numeracy.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Good quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement is in evidence across the school and high expectations of pupil engagement are communicated. The questionnaires indicate that the majority of pupils enjoy their lessons and learning. Parents indicate that teaching is good and that their child is doing well in school. To further enhance the learning experiences of the pupils, more extensive use of active learning methodologies, co-operative group tasks, and scaffolded and differentiated learning opportunities is advised.
- A range of formative and summative assessment approaches is used to monitor pupils' progress and achievement in classrooms. The pupils' questionnaires indicate that homework is corrected regularly and guidance is given to pupils on how to improve their work. Standardised tests are undertaken each year. It is advised that the information arising from these should be further analysed, in order to track pupils' progress in each strand area and to identify areas for development. Existing assessment practices should be augmented to broaden the range of assessment for learning approaches employed in classrooms.
- Tá caighdeán an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith i gcuid mhaith ceachtanna, le roinnt samplaí de dhea-chleachtas le feiceáil, ach tá roinnt scóipe fós chun feabhais i ranganna áirithe. Moltar an dea-cleachtas atá le sonrú a fhorbairt tríd an scoil. Baineann na hoidí úsáid as raon straitéisí agus acmhainní oiriúnacha chun suim na ndaltaí a spreagadh agus ábhar na gceachtanna a léiriú. Ar an iomlán, bunaítear an léitheoireacht ar ábhar na leabhar saothair. Tá sé ar chumas formhór na ndaltaí na leabhair sin a léamh agus léiríonn siad tuiscint ar ábhar na léitheoireachta. Scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil is mó a chleachtar ach breathnaíodh roinnt samplaí maithe de scríbhneoireacht phearsanta na ndaltaí.
- *A good standard of teaching and learning is evident in many Irish lessons, with a number of samples of good practice in evidence. However there is scope for further development in some areas and the promotion across the school of the good practice observed in many classes is advised. Teachers use an appropriate range of strategies and resources to encourage pupils' interest and to illustrate lesson content. For the most part, reading is based on the workbook material. Pupils can read these books and demonstrate understanding of the reading material. Functional writing is mainly practised but some good examples of pupils' personal writing were in evidence.*
- Good quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement is evident in English. The majority of pupils display the ability to participate purposefully in classroom discussion. The use of

structured phonics programmes, graded reading approaches, paired-reading initiatives and class novels, and the promotion of pupils' personal reading serve to foster good levels of reading across the school. The majority of pupils report that they are doing well at reading. Pupils undertake a wide range of functional writing tasks. It is advised that pupils have wider opportunities to write in a range of genres and for a variety of purposes and audiences. Current school-wide approaches to process writing should be reviewed to include an enhanced role for pupils and their peers and greater use of ICT, as far as practicable.

- Due attention is given to teaching and learning in Mathematics and pupils are generally achieving well. An appropriate emphasis on the use of concrete materials and attention to the language of Mathematics was in evidence. There is further scope however for the use of co-operative learning, guided discovery and scaffolded approaches in areas such as problem solving. The implementation of additional strategies to support the minority of pupils who are experiencing difficulties in Mathematics is recommended, for example, through a combination of individualised approaches to address specific needs, and team-teaching
- A broad and balanced programme of physical education (PE) is provided throughout the school. A very good quality of teaching and learning was observed and pupils engaged with enthusiasm in the range of activities undertaken. Good indoor and outdoor facilities and a variety of resources are employed in facilitating pupils' participation in the programme. A number of external supports and sports' associations also contribute to the school programme. A good balance of physical education activities is evident, with a suitable emphasis on co-operative games, skill development, fitness, dance and sports. Provision is also made for pupils to take swimming lessons during the year. Parent questionnaires indicate that PE is a regular curriculum activity.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

The support for pupils with special educational needs is carefully arranged to address a wide range of learning needs. Good in-class and resource room practice was in evidence. Effective provision of support in the promotion of pupils' numeracy, literacy and self-management skills was observed. The learning support and resource teachers work conscientiously with parents, class teachers and other professionals in providing individualised programmes for pupils. Further strengthening of the collaborative approach through regular shared planning meetings is advised. While useful individual education plans (IEPs) were in place, further attention to the setting of targets would enhance the IEP process. Good practice was observed in the special class for pupils with autism. Effective arrangements have also been put in place for the pupils of the class to participate in mainstream classes, as suited to their individual needs.

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 is pleased to note that the good work and commitment of the staff, parents, pupils and board of the school is acknowledged. The positive atmosphere conducive to learning is duly noted. We are grateful the spirit of collaboration and the contribution of our Parents' Association to the overall development of the school was witnessed.

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

- Our in-school management team are having weekly meetings and a review of duties is planned annually.
- The school have undertaken the Green School Project for this school year led by a sub committee of teachers and all staff is on board and the students' committee has been elected.
- A systematic review of all policies has commenced in consultation with all branches of the school community.
- Curriculum Planning and Development are under review with a project on Paired Reading and an investment in levelled readers imminent. Our priority focus for this year in the planning area is Gaeilge.
- Professional Development is encouraged and planned across the staff. The strengths and skills of individual staff members will be shared and further developed.
- Extensive use of active learning methodologies is targeted for the pupils and will be reviewed regularly.