

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

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**St Molaga's Senior National School**  
**Balbriggan, Co. Dublin**  
**Uimhir rolla:16970A**

**Date of inspection: 2 October 2014**



**A N R O I N N** | **D E P A R T M E N T O F**  
**O I D E A C H A I S** | **E D U C A T I O N**  
**A G U S S C I L E A N N A** | **A N D S K I L L S**

## 1. Introduction

St Molaga's Senior National School is a co-educational primary school with an enrolment of 447 pupils. The school also has two special classes for pupils with a specific learning difficulty (SLD). Enrolment figures remain steady and attendance levels are good. During this whole-school evaluation provision for Gaeilge, English, Mathematics and the Visual Arts was evaluated. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in ten mainstream class settings, one special class setting and four support teaching settings. 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 board of management is very effective in both its organisation and its impact.
- The principal demonstrates the qualities and skills of very effective school leadership particularly in terms of her insightful awareness of the needs of pupils as individuals.
- The management of pupils is very good. Pupils demonstrate an interest and enthusiasm for learning and an affirming, productive learning environment has been created within the school.
- The school's self-evaluation processes are of a very high quality.
- The quality of teaching across the subjects evaluated ranges between good and very good with some examples of exemplary practice in all subjects.
- Considerable improvements have been made in pupils' attainment in Mathematics in recent years.
- There are very good practices in place for assessing and tracking pupils' learning from year to year.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Moltar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge a fhorbairt a thuilleadh. Ní mór plean céimnithe do labhairt na Gaeilge a dhearadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn uile-scoile. *Pupils' speaking skills in Irish should be developed further. A progressive incremental plan for oral Irish should be devised and implemented at whole-school level.*
- Differentiation activities for less-able and more-able pupils should be outlined in teachers' planning following the clear identification of appropriate learning objectives and outcomes.

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

- The quality of school management is of a very high standard. The board of management is very effective in both its organisation and its impact. It adopts a very proactive approach to identifying and addressing areas requiring attention. It is very commendable that the board is aware of the standards of learning within the school and the aspects of learning currently being prioritised for development.
- The leadership of the principal is of a very high quality. It is particularly commendable that she demonstrates an insightful awareness of, and interest in, the pupils as individuals. The in-school management team is hardworking and proactive in discharging its duties effectively. Much richness is added to curriculum provision because of the team's work in co-curricular activities.
- The school is very well resourced with materials to support teaching and learning. Teachers use these resources very successfully within classrooms to create good quality learning experiences for the pupils. While the majority of classrooms are located in prefabricated accommodation, the school is successfully maintained as a clean, safe and stimulating learning environment for pupils.
- The management of pupils is very good. An affirming, productive learning environment has been created within the school.
- In a meeting with members of the parents' association conducted as part of the whole-school evaluation strong levels of satisfaction were expressed with the quality of education being provided by the school. Within the report cards sent home to parents there were some very good examples of teachers providing constructive, practical suggestions to parents to support their children's learning. In other instances, there is scope for report cards to provide further comment on attainment.

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

- The quality of school planning is very good in terms of the range of areas addressed. Organisational policies are clearly outlined and are impacting comprehensively and positively on school-life. Curriculum plans are particularly effective where they document choices made for the implementation of the curriculum in a co-ordinated manner throughout the school. Such an approach should inform the review of curriculum plans into the future.
- A highly effective and thorough approach to school self-evaluation has been adopted. Priority areas for development have been carefully identified and worthwhile action plans have been implemented on a whole-school basis. These action plans have clear targets and there are effective systems in place for ensuring that agreed tasks are implemented and monitored. It is very commendable that pupils are aware of what teachers are trying to achieve through these action plans.
- Teachers' long-term planning is very good. Teachers' short-term planning is good. Differentiation activities for less-able and more-able pupils should be outlined in teachers' planning following the clear identification of appropriate learning objectives and outcomes.

- Monthly progress records are maintained with a good amount of detail. It would be worthwhile including a section in the monthly progress record where teachers could add a reflection on pupils' learning within the areas being prioritised in the school self-evaluation process.
- 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

- Baineann scóip chun forbartha le gnéithe de sholáthar na scoile don Ghaeilge, go mórmhór maidir le muinín agus neamhspleáchas na ndaltaí sa chomhrá. Ba léir le linn na meastóireachta go bhfuil ar chumas na foirne na deacrachtaí seo a shárú, áfach. Tá béim fhiúntach curtha ar úsáid na Gaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil i saol laethúil na scoile. Is breá an rud é, fosta, go bhfuil dánta á gcur de ghlanmheabhair ag na daltaí agus go mealltar daltaí chun úsáid a bhaint as an nGaeilge san idirghníomh laethúil le hoidí. Ní mór plean céimnithe do labhairt na Gaeilge a dhearadh anois agus a chur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn uile-scoile. Moltar briathra, abairtí agus frásaí sna téamaí difriúla a aithint do gach rangleibhéal, a thógann go céimniúil ar a bhíonn foghlamtha sna blianta roimhe agus a chuireann leis. B'fhiú tabhairt faoi struchtúr comónta a chur ar na ceachtanna ó bhéal suas trí na rangleibhéil a chuimseoidh múnú cuimsitheach, athrá córúil agus ghrúpa ar abairtí ar mhaithe le muinín a éascú agus tréimhse réamhchumarsáide saibhir le hacmhainní teanga spreagúla. B'fhiú tuilleadh deachtaithe a dhéanamh freisin. Cabhróidh an próiseas tairbheach atá i bhfeidhm sa scoil faoi láthair d'idéithe agus d'acmhainní a sholáthar do na hoidí, go mór d'fhorchéimniú na foghlama ó bhéal sna daltaí. Is fiú cur leis na hacmhainní úsáideacha faighte don léitheoireacht le hacmhainní a dhéanann plé ar imeachtaí reatha atá ar fáil ar-líne. Ó thaobh na scríbhneoireachta de moltar don scoil béim sa bhreis a chur sa scéim litriúcháin ar na focail is minice a úsáidtear sa Ghaeilge agus na focail a bhaineann le saolta na ndaltaí féin.
- *There is scope for development in respect of aspects of the school's provision for Irish, in the main in respect of the confidence and independence of the pupils in Irish conversation. It was evident during the evaluation that the staff has the capacity to overcome these difficulties, however. A valuable emphasis has been placed on the incidental use of Irish in the daily life of the school. Another fine practice is that pupils are learning poems by memory and that pupils are encouraged to use Irish in their daily incidental interactions with the teachers. A progressive incremental plan for oral Irish should be devised and implemented at whole-school level. Verbs, sentences and phrases in the different themes should be identified for each class level, that build incrementally on what is learned in previous years and that develops it. A common structure of oral Irish lesson should be implemented up through the class levels that includes comprehensive modelling, choral and group repetition of sentences to build confidence and a rich pre-communicative phase with inspiring language resources. More dictation should also occur. The valuable process currently in operation in the school for supplying teachers with ideas and resources will contribute greatly to the development of progression in pupils' oral language learning. The useful reading resources already obtained can be augmented with resources which look at current issues that are available on-line to schools. In respect of writing the school is advised to place further emphasis in its spelling scheme on the most frequently used words in Irish and words about pupils' own lives.*

- The quality of teaching, learning, and pupil achievement in English is good. In oral language, particular focus is being placed on vocabulary development. It is very good practice that this focus is being made explicit to pupils thereby enhancing their learning and application of this vocabulary. Further discussion among teachers could usefully develop a systematic approach to monitoring the impact of this strategy. A wide range of organisational settings and approaches are being used very effectively for the teaching and learning of reading. Pupils read with enthusiasm and confidence. Reading material is appropriately chosen to correlate with pupils' ability level and their capacity to engage in increasingly more sophisticated texts. A clearly delineated scheme for phonological awareness is contained in the school's English plan. There is scope for this to become a more significant element of guided reading lessons. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of a range of genres in writing and the teaching of these genres is systematic and effective. A more detailed monitoring of pupils' writing will identify focus areas for progressing pupils' capacity to write within these genres. A student newsletter, blog and the careful display of pupils' work are all effective in providing pupils with an audience for their writing.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is good. Significant improvements in pupils' attainment in Mathematics have been made in recent years. The mathematics curriculum is taught in a broad and balanced manner with lessons being carefully structured and concepts clearly explained. Pupils have very well-developed computation skills and, in some classes, demonstrate a strong capacity for working collaboratively to engage in successful problem-solving. In one particular initiative recently begun, the more explicit consolidation of pupils' learning at the conclusion of each mathematical activity will enhance impact on learning. While good examples of differentiated learning were in evidence in the lessons observed, these good practices would be enhanced by being better situated within the context of clearly defined learning objectives. This provision for differentiated learning needs to be recorded specifically in teachers' planning. Further emphasis should be placed both in planning and in lessons on making the development of mathematical skills explicit. In many instances, very careful attention is paid to the layout and presentation of pupils' written work.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the Visual Arts is good. It is effective practice that the observed lessons were part of a sequence of lessons focusing on a range of elements in art. Such an approach enhances the learning of pupils. Pupils demonstrate imagination and good technique in their completed work across a range of media at a good level of complexity. In some instances, pupils demonstrated a delight in discussing works of art. However, in general, pupils' abilities to discuss their work and the work of other artists requires development.
- The quality of teaching and learning in this school ranges between good and very good with some teachers demonstrating exemplary practice. A variety of rich learning experiences is provided for pupils across the full breadth of the curriculum. Lessons have clear objectives and teachers demonstrate a very good ability to manage different teaching approaches and organisational settings to promote learning. Teachers have good questioning skills. There are very good practices in place for assessing and tracking pupils' learning from year to year. A questionnaire completed by pupils as part of the evaluation process indicates that pupils feel that the school provides them with a safe environment where they can progress in their learning.

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

- Well-structured learning environments were evident in the special class and support settings visited. There were many examples of very skilled teaching with teachers demonstrating a good awareness of pupils' needs. All teacher interactions with pupils were warm and encouraging.
- The school has two special classes for pupils with a specific learning difficulty (SLD), of which one was visited during the evaluation. The teaching and learning activities evaluated were fully appropriate to the needs of pupils with a diagnosed specific learning difficulty. More explicit linkage to baseline assessment data within the individualised plans prepared is advocated.
- The provision for pupils with additional learning needs is guided by group plans or individual education plans (IEPs). Good formats of individual education plans and group support plans have been developed and priority learning needs are identified clearly. Some targets outlined in IEPs are specific and measurable, but others are presented currently more as goals or as strategies. These targets should be more measurable and timed and the inclusion of achievement criteria for them would be very helpful in the target setting process. The common format of teachers' short-term plans which is used alongside individualised and group plans is particularly reflective and useful and is very much commended.

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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 of St Molaga's Senior N.S. would like to acknowledge the affirmation received in this Whole School Evaluation report.

The Board is encouraged by and agrees with the identified strengths and good practices as outlined in the report.

We would also thank the inspectors for their acknowledgement of the quality of teaching, the pupils' interest and enthusiasm for learning and the affirming, productive learning environment created in St. Molagas' S.N.S.

The Board also acknowledges the strong levels of satisfaction indicated by parents and by pupils in their questionnaire responses.

The Board wishes to acknowledge the positive contribution of our ancillary staff and to thank the whole school community who contributed to the process.

**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 school has taken on board the recommendations made and the implementation of these has been prioritised as part of the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan.

