

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**St Mary's BNS  
Moyglare Road, Maynooth, Co. Kildare  
Uimhir rolla: 17341U**

**Date of inspection: 2 October 2013**



## 1. Introduction

St Mary's BNS is a vertical, all-boys, primary school situated in the historic university town of Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The school operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. There are 506 pupils enrolled in the school, including a number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. To accommodate the increasing pupil population, the school has been extended and refurbished a number of times. Overall, attendance rates are very good. During the whole-school evaluation, inspectors observed teaching and learning in eleven mainstream class settings and five 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 principal provides very effective leadership to the school. The promotion of high standards in pupils' learning, balanced with the provision of a holistic learning experience for pupils, is central to his vision for the school.
- The board of management and the parent-teacher association are very supportive of the work of the school.
- In collaboration with in-school management, all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are committed to high standards and they actively foster a positive and affirming school atmosphere.
- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics, English and History is of a very high quality.
- There is very good support for pupils with special educational needs.
- Pupil management is excellent.
- The quality of whole-school planning and teachers' planning is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Class teachers should ensure that learning tasks and activities are suitably adapted for pupils with special educational needs and other pupils with different abilities.
- Moltar na scileanna teanga sa Ghaeilge a chomhtháthú ar bhealach níos nádúrtha, agus deiseanna sa bhreis a sholáthair do na daltaí na frásaí nua a chleachtadh le chéile i suímh réalacha. *The integration of Irish language skills in a more natural manner, and extra opportunities for pupils to practice new phrases together in a more realistic context is recommended.*

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

- The board of management undertakes its duties very effectively. The board is very aware of the school's priorities and plays an active role in supporting and monitoring school improvement initiatives. Individual members share their personal and professional skills generously. Finances are managed prudently and accounts are certified independently. The board is praised for the substantial improvements to school accommodation and the maintenance of the school's facilities.
- The principal provides very effective and strategic leadership to the school. His leadership style is characterised by a calm, well-informed and consultative approach. The promotion of high standards in pupils' learning, balanced with the provision of a holistic learning experience for pupils, is central to his vision for the school. He is ably assisted by a dedicated in-school management team who capably lead school improvement in the area of their own individual responsibilities.
- A very active and committed parent-teacher association is in place. The principal attends the association's meetings to discuss policy formulation and routine school activities with the members. Parents' representatives report very high levels of satisfaction with the school and with the quality of support it provides for pupils. The school is highly commended for the manner in which it communicates with parents and the wider school community.
- The management of pupils is excellent. The school frequently celebrates pupils' achievements and talents in a very affirming manner. Pupils are eager to learn and are respectful in their interactions with their teachers and peers. The outcomes of pupil questionnaires administered during the whole-school evaluation (WSE), indicate that all pupils surveyed feel safe in their classrooms. In line with the school's mission statement they are facilitated to engage in a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- Resources are managed very effectively. A broad range of teaching and learning resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) is available and used effectively across the school. Ancillary staff provide valuable support in many areas of school life.

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

- The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Organisational policies give very good guidance on school matters. To fully reflect the school's inclusive practices, a review of the school's enrolment policy is advised. In the main, whole-school curriculum plans reflect the school context, and focus appropriately on decisions taken with regard to the implementation of the curriculum.
- There are agreed procedures in relation to teachers' planning. All teachers adopt an objective-based approach to short-term planning. Where best practice was observed, this incorporated detail regarding pupils' learning activities and varied methodologies. In a number of instances, there is potential to clarify the content to be taught for lessons in Irish.
- The school has made significant strides in the identification of targets for school improvement in literacy and numeracy. There is evidence that the staff has embraced a

number of the agreed actions for improvement. The school should now devise strategies to evaluate improvements in pupils' learning in the chosen priority areas.

- 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

- Teaching, learning and pupil achievement in the settings observed is of a very high quality. Lessons are lively, interesting and well structured. Very effective whole-class teaching was observed. In a small number of classes, differentiated group work and tasks were provided. Class teachers should ensure that learning tasks and activities are suitably adapted to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and other pupils with different abilities. In questionnaires completed by the pupils in fourth and sixth classes as part of the WSE, the majority of pupils reported that their teachers explain things clearly during lessons. The quality of pupils' presentation and penmanship is of a very high standard.
- Tá caighdeán na múinteoireachta agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge go maith ar an iomlán. Baineann na hoidí feidhm éifeachtach as raon leathan straitéisí chun scileanna éisteachta agus labhartha na ndaltaí a chothú. Moltar mar a úsáidtear an Ghaeilge go neamhfhoirmiúil agus mar theanga bhainistíocht ranga go minic i rith an lae. I bhformhór na ranganna, tugtar ionchur teanga mhaith do na daltaí agus leagtar béim chuí ar mhúineadh struchtúr na teanga. Chun cabhrú le sealbhú teanga na ndaltaí, moltar na scileanna teanga a chomhtháthú ar bhealach níos nádúrtha, agus deiseanna sa bhreis a sholáthair do na daltaí na frásaí nua a chleachtadh le chéile i suímh réalacha. Léann daltaí go muiníneach agus go cruinn. Ar an iomlán, soláthraítear tascanna oiriúnacha sa scríbhneoireacht.
- *The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is good overall. Teachers effectively use a range of strategies to foster pupils' listening and speaking skills. It is praiseworthy how Irish is used informally and for classroom management frequently during the day. In the majority of classes, pupils are given good language input and an appropriate emphasis is placed on the teaching of language structure. To assist with pupils' language acquisition, the integration of language skills in a more natural manner, and extra opportunities for pupils to practice new phrases together in a more realistic context, is recommended. Pupils read confidently and accurately. In the main, appropriate writing tasks are provided.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is highly commendable. There is a very good focus on developing pupils' oral language skills throughout the school. Pupils are confident, expressive communicators. In some classrooms, pupils recite and discuss well-chosen poetry with enthusiasm. This practice should be extended. Standards in reading are very good and all teachers ensure that reading skills are taught in an explicit manner. Pupils display very good writing skills across a range of genres.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is of a very high standard. Where very effective practice was observed, it was characterised by teacher modelling and the explicit teaching of concepts and skills. Standards in Mathematics are very good and pupils demonstrate comprehensive levels of understanding of the topics covered. To enhance provision further, more consistency in the teaching of problem-

solving strategies which are linked to real-life situations, is advised. With regard to differentiation, some effective co-operative team-teaching and suitably adapted tasks for pupils were noted during the evaluation. This practice should be further embedded across the school.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is very good. In the majority of classrooms teachers present lively and engaging lessons. There are some very worthwhile examples of history topics being integrated with other curricular areas. Creditable emphasis is placed on local studies and on personal history throughout the school. In many classrooms there is good emphasis placed on the development of skills, on independent learning and on project work. Pupils display a very good knowledge and deep understanding of topics taught. Where pupils were enabled to communicate their learning in a variety of ways, provision was particularly effective.
- The quality of assessment approaches is good. The use of checklists, samples of pupils' work and teacher-designed tasks and tests are a feature of the school's practice. Pupils' written work is well monitored. The use of criterion-referenced assessment approaches, as noted in some settings, should be extended.

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

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is of a very high standard. Individual education plans (IEPs) are carefully devised and are informed by the outcomes of appropriate assessment data. Commendably, learning targets are closely aligned to pupils' prioritised needs.

- Models of support are flexible in response to the needs of pupils. Overall, skilful teaching was observed and pupils are making very good progress. In order to optimise this good work, class teachers should take further account of the content of pupils' IEPs, and should ensure that learning tasks and activities are suitably adapted for pupils with special educational needs and other pupils with different abilities. The special needs assistants make a very valuable contribution to the inclusion and care of pupils.

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.**

Having reviewed the report, the Board of Management acknowledges that it gives a fair and balanced reflection of the school at the time of the evaluation. It welcomes the many comments highlighting positive attributes of the school.

#### **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 will continue to build on its strengths and has already begun to implement recommendations made by the inspectors. These will be formally embedded into school practice and policy as part of the on-going school review and planning process.