

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Mary Help of Christians GNS
Navan Road, Dublin 7
Uimhir rolla: 17367P**

Date of inspection: 1 October 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

1. Introduction

Mary Help of Christians Girls' National School is a vertical school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The school serves the Navan Road Parish and is one of three schools located on the same site. The school has a current enrolment of 435 pupils and attendance levels are very good for the majority of pupils. 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 proactively supports the development of the school and undertakes its duties in a conscientious manner.
- The school is led by a principal whose work is efficient, effective and whose approach is purposefully guided by identified school priorities.
- The commitment and dedication of the in-school management team contribute to a clear focus on teaching and learning.
- Teachers are commended for their competent classroom management skills and their effective methodologies in mediating the curriculum to pupils.
- A good quality school development process is well established in this school.
- The achievement of many pupils in Mathematics and English is very good.
- Pupils' independent writing skills are developed to a high standard throughout the school.
- The pupils are well behaved and enthusiastic learners.
- Parents play a positive role in supporting the work of the school.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Learning activities should be further differentiated to accommodate the varying needs of pupils.
- Moltar scileanna teanga na ndaltaí a fhorbairt go córasach agus a gcumas cumarsáide a chothú a thuilleadh sa Ghaeilge. *It is recommended that pupils' language skills be systematically developed and their communicative abilities further fostered in Irish.*

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of the work of the board of management is very good. The board is properly constituted and all members fulfil their tasks diligently. The maintenance and improvement of school facilities are on-going priorities of the board. Consideration should now be given to critically assessing the impact of the open access to the school yard on pupil safety.
- The principal has very efficient and effective management skills. Her leadership in the development of teaching and learning is commendable. The in-school management team is highly motivated and the duties assigned reflect the school's identified priorities. All post-holders set clear targets for their work and provide worthwhile support for the effective monitoring and implementation of the curriculum.
- Teachers are deployed effectively and work in a collaborative manner. Good quality resources are prepared and classrooms are presented as stimulating learning environments.
- The parents' association is very supportive of the work of the school. Parents' representatives expressed a high level of satisfaction with the education provision in the school. This is further substantiated by the analysis of questionnaires administered to parents during the evaluation. Effective and varied communication structures have been developed within the school and with the wider school community.
- The management of pupils is very good. Teachers are to be commended for the positive learning atmosphere and the sense of care and community that exists in the school. Pupils are enthusiastic and eager learners and present as courteous and respectful in their relationships with peers and teachers. The analysis of pupils' questionnaires indicates that pupils feel secure and confident in their learning environment.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of school planning is very good. It is developed in a collaborative manner. A good quality three-year school development plan facilitates the systematic review of school policies. The smooth running of the school is testament to the effectiveness of organisational planning. The board recognises the need to review the school's enrolment policy to ensure compliance with The Equal Status Act (2004). In general, curriculum planning is effective in providing specific guidance for its implementation at classroom level.
- Teachers' individual classroom planning is good. Plans provide clarity and direction for teaching through outlining specific objectives and identifying appropriate teaching methodologies. However, a whole-school approach to documenting differentiation strategies is advised. A review of the current approach to recording monthly progress records should be considered in order to facilitate self-evaluation at classroom level.

- 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

- Is inmholta mar a úsáideann na hoidí an Ghaeilge go leanúnach mar theanga teagais agus mar theanga bainistíocht ranga. Cuirtear béim oiriúnach ar leathnú foclóra na ndaltaí agus ar an iomlán, tá stór leathan foclóra, rannta agus amhrán ar eolas acu. Baintear feidhm thairbheach as modhanna múinte agus as áiseanna spreagúla chun cumas cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Tuigeann an bhainistíocht in-scoile go bhfuil gá le h-athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an bplean scoile don Ghaeilge. B'fhiú ionchur nua teanga a roghnú do gach rang agus breis béime a leagan ar cheart-úsáid na mbriathra chun a chinntiú go bhfuil forbairt chéimniúil á dhéanamh ar scileanna labhartha na ndaltaí. Ar an iomlán, bunaítear an léitheoireacht agus an scríbhneoireacht ar leabhair shaothair. B'fhiú scóip na léitheoireachta a leathnú. Chuipe sin, moltar scéim léitheoireachta oiriúnach a roghnú. Sonraítear samplaí de scríbhneoireacht phearsanta i roinnt ranganna ach is scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil is mó a chleachtar sa scoil. Ní mór eispéiris níos leithne scríbhneoireachta a sholáthair agus forbairt níos céimniúla a dhéanamh ar ábhar na scríbhneoireachta ó rang go rang.

The manner in which teachers continuously use Irish as the medium for teaching and classroom management is praiseworthy. An appropriate emphasis is placed on extending pupils' vocabulary and in general, pupils have learned a wide range of vocabulary, poetry and songs. Teaching methodologies and stimulating resources are used to good effect in the development of the pupils' communication skills. The in-school management team have recognised the need to review the whole-school plan for Irish. The identification of language inputs for each class and additional emphasis on the correct use of verbs would be worthwhile in systematically developing the pupils' communication skills. Workbooks are used predominantly as a basis for reading and writing. It would be beneficial to extend the range of reading. To this end, the selection of a reading scheme is recommended. Samples of personal writing were noted in some classrooms but it is functional writing that is mainly practised in the school. A broader writing experience and the more systematic development of writing topics should be undertaken.

- In English, pupils have good oral language skills. It is advised, however, to ensure that new language in-put is regularly taught during lessons rather than solely facilitating the expression of existing language. Early literacy skills are taught effectively and developed systematically throughout the school. However, the use of whole-class texts in the middle and senior classes for the teaching of reading needs to be revisited in order to ensure effective instruction for less able pupils. The quality of pupils' independent writing as they proceed through the school is very good. Further emphasis should be placed on the cultivation of independent writing skills in the infant classes. The standard of penmanship is good.

- The quality of teaching and learning in many aspects of Mathematics is very good. Lessons are very well structured and paced. The language of Mathematics is taught systematically. All teachers use a variety of effective resources and successful organisational settings to support learning activities. Beneficial use is made of games in many classes to consolidate number facts. Carefully planned team-teaching is in place in the senior classes. This initiative is based on the analysis of frequent formative assessment. Its successful implementation is reported to be very effective in raising the achievements of pupils at their own level. This good practice should be used in all classroom settings. Further differentiated activities would challenge and extend the learning potential of more able pupils in all class settings. It is also advised that problem-solving strategies be more incrementally developed. Further use of the environment would provide a suitable context for skills development and enable pupils to apply their learning in an active manner.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is good. Lessons are characterised by high levels of pupil engagement. Learning tasks are sequenced in a clear and logical order. Basic health-related fitness concepts are appropriately integrated into activities to facilitate pupils' understanding of their physiological responses to physical activity. Pupils' skills are incrementally developed in some areas of the curriculum particularly in dance and games. This good practice should be extended to all strands of the curriculum. To enhance skill development, a range of assessment strategies with appropriate criteria and performance descriptors should be formulated to evaluate pupils' practical performance. The contribution made by dedicated teachers in the promotion, organisation and delivery of the extracurricular sport and physical activity programmes is commended. Pupils have participated successfully in many external sporting initiatives and competitions.
- The quality of teaching and learning in History is very good overall. There is a clear structure to lessons and in general there is an appropriate focus on the relevant skills to be developed. Suitable resources and focused discussion contribute to the development of these skills. Pupils are encouraged to critically evaluate and synthesise information presented through discussion, group-work and through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). Pupils' incremental understanding of History is further extended through the investigation of particular aspects of personal and local history. A broader selection of stories for all class levels is recommended. At this juncture, a whole-school approach to ongoing assessment would be worthwhile to effectively monitor the implementation of the school plan. The teaching of History is successfully enriched by integrating it meaningfully with other aspects of the curriculum.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in this school is good. Lessons are carefully structured and effectively paced. Group work is purposeful and well organised. Learning activities are well resourced. The competent use of ICT as a teaching resource is in evidence. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and co-operate with their teachers and one another during their learning activities. Pupils are enabled to become independent learners. To optimise pupils' learning potential, some activities should be further differentiated to meet the varying needs of pupils. In some instances, these activities could be more challenging for pupils. Summative, formative and diagnostic assessment practices are well developed in the school. Informative records are collated documenting pupils' progress for the duration of their school attendance. The analysis of this data is used productively to inform decision making for curriculum implementation at whole-

school level. However, further analysis of this rich data should be undertaken as a guide to planning for differentiated learning activities at individual classroom level.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- Very good provision is made in providing support to pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and good quality teaching was observed in the SEN settings. Particular strengths of this provision are the clear identification of pupils' learning needs and the specific and comprehensive planning to meet these needs. The collaborative approach of the learning-support teachers and the communication and co-operation with class-teachers is a hallmark of good practice. The work of the special needs assistants (SNAs) is purposeful and appropriate to pupils' needs. To enhance provision in the classroom setting, it is advised that SEN teachers focus their attention further on working with the target pupils in small group contexts thereby better supporting these pupils both in their interaction with their peers and in accessing the mainstream curriculum.
- A positive learning environment has been created for pupils in receipt of support for English as an additional language (EAL). Some collaboration between the EAL and class teachers regarding programme planning is in evidence. The provision for EAL needs to be reorganised to optimise its impact on pupil learning. While there are some pupils who no longer require EAL support, there are others who would benefit from more focused and intensive support especially in targeting the development of their cognitive language.

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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 in leading the whole school community of Mary Help of Christians G.N.S. wishes to acknowledge the constructive and professional manner in which the inspectors of the Department of Education and Skills conducted this Whole School Evaluation. Taking part in the W.S.E. has been a valuable experience from which the school has benefited enormously.

We are delighted that the report affirms the dedication, hard work and conscientious commitment of the Board of Management, Principal, our in-school management team, teachers, SNAs and parents. The board congratulates the entire school community for their diligence and co-operation.

We welcome the fact that the school is functioning very effectively and that the report commends our effective teaching methodologies. The report acknowledges that staff is highly motivated and that the quality of school planning is very good. Our highly developed system of planning has evolved over many years and reflects the many hours of collaboration invested by staff during their personal time.

We are particularly pleased that the report affirms our positive learning atmosphere, the sense of care and community that exists in the school and that pupils feel secure and confident in their learning environment. We agree that our pupils are enthusiastic and eager learners.

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

We find the inspectors' recommendations very constructive. Since our W.S.E. we have implemented the recommended adjustment to our Enrolment Policy. As a staff we constantly engage in a process of self-evaluation and it is indeed affirming that recommendations made were already identified by staff as priorities. To facilitate their implementation we intend to consider these recommendations for inclusion in our School Development Plan which is due to be updated in September 2011. We look forward to welcoming D.E.S. inspectors to our school in the future.