

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**St Catherine's Senior National School  
Ratoath Road, Cabra, Dublin 7  
Uimhir rolla:17465P**

**Date of inspection: 23 April 2010**



## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Catherine’s Senior National School was undertaken in April 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Social, Personal and Health Education. 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.

### INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St Catherine’s Senior National School is a girls’ school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The Dominican Sisters established the school in 1944 and the order remained as trustees until 2006. Trusteeship then transferred to the St Lawrence O’Toole Trust. The school shares a building with the local girls’ junior school and caters for pupils from the Dublin suburb of Cabra. It participates in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Enrolment has remained stable over the past number of years. The successful implementation of the school’s attendance strategy impacts positively on pupils’ attendance patterns.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	181
Mainstream classes in the school	8
Teachers on the school staff	13
Mainstream class teachers	8
Teachers working in support roles	4
Special needs assistants	1

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

### 1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school endeavours to create an environment where all pupils are respected and are encouraged to develop to their full potential. The nurturing of pupils’ gifts and talents is guided by the school’s motto “Truth”. The realisation of this motto is evident in the happy and purposeful learning environment which pertains in the school.

### 1.2 Board of management

The board of management is highly supportive of the work of the school and its members are well informed with regard to the board’s duties and responsibilities. Individual roles have been allocated and board members share their time and expertise generously. Meetings are convened on a regular basis. The board reports that accounts are well managed and audited appropriately. The board expressed as a priority its commitment to the school’s mission statement and the

provision of a good quality education for all pupils. To this end, the board ensures that all necessary resources are provided to maximise the learning experience for the pupils.

### **1.3 In-school management**

The principal assumed her duties at the commencement of the school year. In her role as principal, she demonstrates effective instructional leadership skills, regularly monitoring the implementation of the school plan. Organisational and administrative tasks are carried out very efficiently. The principal places great importance on open communication and collegiality and liaises closely with the in-school management team regarding various aspects of curriculum and organisational and pastoral care initiatives. Decision-making with colleagues is collaborative. A positive school climate is cultivated where staff members are affirmed and encouraged.

The in-school management team comprises the deputy principal and two special duties post-holders. With the support and leadership of the principal it is effective in carrying out its duties. Further consideration should now be given to ensuring that these responsibilities encompass a more balanced range of organisational, curricular and pastoral duties and that they reflect the ongoing needs of the school. The valuable contribution made by the previous principal in leading and managing the school and in setting up systems for its smooth administration is acknowledged.

### **1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community**

The quality of the management of relationships and communication with the school community is good. Effective and open lines of communication are maintained within the school community. Consultation with parents is facilitated effectively through written communication and school newsletters. Parents are informed of their children's progress through organised parent-teacher meetings and written annual progress reports. The establishment of a school website would further enhance communication and share pupils' work with the school community.

Initiatives such as the development of the school garden successfully involve parents in the work of the school. The board of management should make every reasonable effort to enable the parent body to set up a parents' association to increase parental involvement in their children's education and to empower parents to take a more active part in the school.

### **1.5 Management of pupils**

The management of pupils is very good. A positive, inclusive and respectful ethos permeates the school atmosphere. Effective routines are established which contribute to the creation and maintenance of a secure and happy school environment. Pupils are affirmed and encouraged in their learning and they demonstrate high levels of confidence, respect and self-esteem. They are eager to participate in learning activities and contribute willingly to all aspects of school life.

Through their participation in the *Green School* committee some pupils have practical experience of decision-making and of the democratic process. The setting up of a student council would give further opportunity to pupils to participate in a decision-making forum and enable them to become agents of positive change in their own lives. Transition to post-primary schools is carefully managed.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning**

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. Policies required by legislation have been devised through the collaboration of the board, the teachers and parents. Very comprehensive curriculum planning is in place which is clearly contextualised to the needs of the school and is implemented effectively and regularly monitored. Other successful aspects of planning include a range of documented procedures which are implemented on a day-to-day basis, ensuring the smooth and efficient running of the school.

The overall quality of teachers' classroom planning is good. Many teachers clearly reference their long-term planning to the whole-school plan. This good practice should be extended to all classrooms. Very good examples of short-term planning, providing clarity and direction for teaching through the identification of specific objectives and methodologies are also in evidence. A whole-school template has been devised to document monthly progress records. A more consistent whole-school approach to the level of detail recorded by individual teachers would bring this worthwhile initiative to fruition and further guide the ongoing monitoring of curriculum implementation.

### **2.2 Child protection policy and procedures**

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Science Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2001). Confirmation was also provided 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.

## **3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **3.1 Language**

#### *Gaeilge*

Ar an iomlán tá foghlaim agus teagasc na Gaeilge go maith sa scoil. Tá plean scoile deartha don ábhar ina leagtar síos spriocanna foghlama agus ábhar teagaisc do na ranganna éagsúla. Tá timpeallacht oiriúnach cruthaithe don Ghaeilge i gcuid mhaith ranganna agus baintear feidhm chuí as raon breá áiseanna oiriúnacha chun tacú leis an bhfoghlaim. Baintear úsáid rialta as an nGaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil i gcuid mhaith ranganna. Is inmholta mar a reáchtáladh campa samhraidh Gaeilge do na daltaí chun a suim a mhúscailt sa Ghaeilge agus sa chultúr Gaelach.

Baintear feidhm fhóna as an bhfilíocht agus aithrisíonn na daltaí amhráin agus rainn go muiníneach soiléir. Eagraítear gníomhaíochtaí éisteachta go céimniúil agus léiríonn na daltaí tuiscint mhaith ar an teanga i gcuid de na ranganna. Múintear ionchur teanga cuí i roinnt ranganna agus déantar cleachtadh rialta ar na heiseamláirí teanga. Is inmholta mar a bhaintear feidhm éifeachtach as straitéisí éagsúla ar nós: drámaíocht, obair bheirte agus cluichí teanga chun cumas

cumarsáide na ndaltaí a fhorbairt i suímh éagsúla. Déanann na daltaí an-iarracht an Ghaeilge a labhairt agus tá struchtúir theanga mhaith ag roinnt acu. Is fiú go mór tógáil ar an obair thábhachtach seo i ngach rang agus béim sa bhreis a chur ar mhúineadh na mbriathra i gcomhthéacs na n-eiseamláirí teanga.

Múintear scileanna na léitheoireachta go héifeachtach i gcuid de na ranganna. Tá sé ar chumas cuid de na daltaí léitheoireacht Ghaeilge a dhéanamh le cruinneas agus le tuiscint áirithe. B'fhiú a chinntiú, áfach, go gcuirtear clár ullmhúchán don léitheoireacht i bhfeidhm agus go bhforbraítear na scileanna go céimniúil ag gach leibhéal. Moltar béim a chur ar mhúineadh fhogharluach na litreach agus plean fóineolaíochta a leagan amach ar bhonn uile-scoile. Thabharfadh soláthar breise d'ábhar léitheoireachta grádaithe deiseanna do dhaltaí léitheoireacht a chleachtadh i gcomhthéacsanna níos leithne. Cuirtear ar chumas na ndaltaí téacsanna gairde atá bunaithe ar théamaí an churaclaim maraon le cleachtaí feidhmiúla as leabhair shaothair a scríobh. Is fiú tógáil ar an obair seo agus forbairt a dhéanamh ar struchtúir na n-abairtí agus ar scríbhneoireacht neamhspleách na ndaltaí. Baintear úsáid as uirlisí éagsúla measúnaithe i nGaeilge ar nós dírbhreachnú an mhúinteora, tascanna agus trialacha an oide, agus bailiúcháin d'obair na ndaltaí. Moltar critéir a leagan amach ar bhonn uile-scoile do mheasúnú na teanga.

### ***Irish***

*In general teaching and learning in Irish is good. A whole-school plan has been devised in which learning targets and content are outlined for the different classes. Suitable learning environments for Irish are created in most classrooms and judicious use is made of a range of resources to support learning. Irish is used informally on a regular basis in many classrooms. It is commendable that an Irish summer camp has been organised to stimulate pupils' interest in the language and culture.*

*Poetry is suitably emphasised and pupils recite songs, rhymes and poems clearly and confidently. Listening activities are systematically organised and pupils display a good understanding of the language. In general appropriate language input is taught and sufficient practice is given to pupils to consolidate language exemplars. The various effective strategies, including, drama, pairwork and language games, employed to develop pupils' communicative abilities are commended. Pupils make great efforts to speak Irish and some have good language structures and can use them in different contexts. It would be very worthwhile to build on this good practice and develop language exemplars and structures on a whole-school basis.*

*Reading skills are taught effectively in some classes. Some pupils read in Irish with accuracy and a certain degree of understanding. It is necessary to ensure, however, that a specific plan is implemented for early literacy and that reading skills are developed systematically on a whole-school basis. Emphasis should also be placed on the development of phonological and phonemic awareness for which a plan should be delineated and implemented in every class. A greater variety of reading materials would afford pupils opportunities to practise reading in broader contexts. Pupils are enabled to write short texts based on the curriculum themes and to complete functional exercises from workbooks. It is recommended that further opportunities be afforded to pupils to increase their capacity in structuring sentences and in independent writing. Various assessment methods are used to evaluate Irish such as teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and collections of pupils' work. It is advised that criteria be created for assessment in Irish on a whole-school basis.*

## **English**

The quality of teaching and learning in English is very good. Well-structured and motivating lessons are taught and pupils engage confidently in their learning activities. Information and communication technology (ICT) is skilfully and judiciously used by teachers. The acquisition of vocabulary and frequent opportunities for class discussion effectively broadens pupils' language experiences. Pupils are confident speakers and are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas using extensive and varied vocabulary. The implementation of a discrete oral language programme and the systematic assessment of skills would further enhance pupils' language development. Throughout the school, pupils experience a wide variety of carefully selected poetry. In many classrooms, pupils demonstrate a very good facility for poetry discussion and recitation.

Pupils' reading skills are carefully nurtured and teachers are commended for the effective differentiation strategies used throughout the school. All classrooms and circulation areas are presented as very print-rich and stimulating learning environments. A varied range of suitable reading material is available in all classrooms and careful consideration underpins the selection of a very wide range of interesting novels. Pupils read with great expression and apply a broad range of decoding and comprehension skills with confidence and enjoyment. The school is commended for the attractive, comfortable and well-stocked library which further enriches pupils' reading experiences.

A well-balanced writing programme is in evidence. Through the systematic and consistent implementation of the *First Steps* writing programme, pupils write successfully and confidently in a wide variety of genres. Penmanship and presentation skills are carefully progressed across the school and pupils display a sense of pride in their written work. Samples of pupils' completed work are displayed attractively and celebrated in all classes. A multifaceted approach is adopted in the teaching and learning of spellings and pupils successfully apply these skills as they undertake a broad range of writing activities.

## **3.2 Mathematics**

Teaching and learning in Mathematics is of a very good standard with some very effective practice observed during the course of the evaluation. Under its DEIS action plan, the school implements a number of strategies which successfully impact on raising attainment levels in specific areas of Mathematics. Lessons in Mathematics are stimulating and there is an appropriate consensus and emphasis at a whole-school level on the explicit teaching of mathematical vocabulary. Skilful questioning techniques guide the learning experience and enable pupils to link new concepts with prior learning experiences. ICT is competently used by teachers during concept development and consolidation activities. Mathematics-rich environments are suitably created in all classrooms and a thematic approach focuses mathematics displays in the circulation areas of the school. This is very good practice. Samples of pupils' work are also attractively displayed and these displays further link mathematical activities to aspects of school life and the wider environment.

Pupils display confidence in and positive attitudes to the learning of Mathematics. Pupils in all classes display a very good ability to recall number facts and perform mental and written calculations accurately across a range of strands. Further development of problem solving strategies is recommended at whole-school level to extend pupils' competencies in this area. The manipulation of concrete mathematical materials was a positive feature of all lessons observed and this praiseworthy practice serves to reinforce the understanding of concepts being taught. In

many classrooms, pupils' engagement is further sustained through the use of individual whiteboards during the phase of concept acquisition. Pupils record their work in copybooks and this written work is of a very good standard. Appropriate monitoring and formative feedback further encourages the pupils in their efforts. Standardised test results indicate that for the most part, pupils are making very good progress which is commensurate with their ability levels.

### **3.3 Social, Personal and Health Education.(SPHE)**

Overall the SPHE curriculum is being implemented very successfully and pupils acquire a balance of information, skills, values and attitudes through their engagement with the programme. Teachers successfully nurture a positive school climate that espouses the school's ethos of respect and truth. This atmosphere is manifested through a sense of care and respect for all, encouragement and affirmation of pupils, the promotion of positive relationships and the allocation of responsibilities to pupils. The teaching staff is also vigilant in providing a secure, safe and healthy environment for pupils.

A broad and balanced SPHE programme, responding to the needs pupils, is delivered in the school. The Walk Tall, Stay Safe and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes are appropriately incorporated into the SPHE curriculum and enhance pupils' knowledge and skills in this curriculum area. External personnel assist in senior classes in the implementation of the more sensitive aspects of the RSE programme. During discrete SPHE lessons a range of topics is explored using a variety of participative methodologies including problem-solving approaches, games, group work, and class discussion. A particular emphasis is placed on the promotion of communication and decision-making skills through which pupils develop the capacity to become both confident contributors and respectful listeners. The programme nurtures pupils' self-esteem and contributes significantly to pupils' inter-personal development. Inclusive and respectful language is fostered to facilitate pupils in expressing their feelings appropriately.

Assessment consists primarily of unrecorded teacher observations and the maintenance of a range of worksheets in pupils' portfolios. Further assessment practices should include the recording of significant observations; the use of well-structured teacher-designed tasks and the recording of engagement in group-based activities. Pupils should also be provided with opportunities to engage in self-assessment.

### **3.4 Assessment**

The quality of assessment in the school is very good. There is a comprehensive range of formal and informal assessment tools used within the school. These include teacher observation, the monitoring of pupils' written work, teacher-designed tasks and standardised and diagnostic tests. Standardised tests are used effectively in English and Mathematics to assess pupils' progress and to identify pupils who may require additional support. Specific assessment tools have been devised by the school. These are based on precise criteria directly related to targets identified in the DEIS action plan for literacy and numeracy. These tests are multi-dimensional in their focus; monitoring individual pupil's attainment levels and the implementation and the success of the DEIS action plan. Assessment records are collated and presented in an accessible manner. Test results are recorded carefully and centrally stored.

## 4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

### 4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The comprehensive special-education needs policy takes account of the *Learning Support Guidelines (2000)* and relevant Department circulars. Three teachers work specifically in special education support. At the time of the evaluation supplementary support was delivered through the withdrawal of pupils from mainstream classrooms to receive group tuition. However it is reported that the support model makes some provision for in-class support to facilitate the implementation of a mathematics recovery programme in second class. As a means of enhancing support education provision, consideration should now be given to further developing in-class approaches and to planning collaboratively for such initiatives. This will provide an opportunity to target the specific needs of pupils in an integrated setting and share the significant expertise of teachers. Further coordination of the supports would also optimise impact on learning progress.

Appropriate screening mechanisms are in place for the identification of pupils requiring supplementary support. The results of assessments, consultation with class teachers and relevant information from parents are purposefully used in the development of individual educational programmes (IEP) and group plans. Some IEPs are very comprehensive with clear targets that are realistic and attainable within the instruction period. This good practice should be emulated in devising all plans for pupils with special educational needs. In some instances further diagnostic testing should be administered to ensure that relevant targets are set for pupils. Specific roles for mainstream teachers and parents should be delineated in all IEPs and implemented accordingly to coordinate support for pupils. A greater link is required between the IEP and planning and progress records to ensure that targets are accomplished. Progress records of pupils' attainment and skills should be maintained on a continuous basis.

The support rooms are well resourced and attractive learning environments are created where pupils' work is celebrated through display. In general, lessons in support contexts are well structured and a variety of purposeful learning strategies employed. In some cases, however, there is need to match the teaching material more closely to pupils' abilities. Interactions between teachers and pupils are very affirming. There is one special needs assistant (SNA) in the school who works conscientiously under the guidance of mainstream teachers.

### 4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

Pupils who learn English as an additional language are making satisfactory progress in acquiring language skills. Support at present is provided on a withdrawal basis. A variety of assessments monitor pupils' progress and the *Primary School Assessment Kit* is used to assess pupils' language proficiency prior to the commencement of language teaching. The use of this assessment kit should now be extended to all pupils in receipt of language support.

The home-school-community liaison (HSCL) programme promotes parental involvement in the school effectively. Policy has been devised in collaboration with parents and teachers. An action plan guides the implementation of this plan. Current practice contributes in a variety of ways to progressing parental partnership through the development of supportive linkages between the home, the school and selected community agencies. Home-visits are routinely conducted to visit the homes of targeted pupils. A variety of courses is organised for parents including cookery, flower arranging, Gaelic and ICT. These classes enable parents to develop personal and leadership skills and build capacity for further parental involvement in the school. Parental involvement in the education of their children is encouraged through initiatives, such as *Maths for*

*Fun, Story Sacks* and shared reading programmes. It is commendable that senior pupils and parents are involved in some initiatives. The HSCL coordinator works closely and diligently with a range of agencies to address the needs of individual pupils.

The *School Completion Programme* (SCP) organises initiatives to improve attendance and participation in school effectively. A commendable programme of activities has been devised to support targeted pupils. These include a homework club, holiday supports, sporting activities and therapeutic support services. It is commendable that both qualitative and quantitative self-evaluation is undertaken to assess and review the programme. This initiative is a valuable asset to the school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school and its members are committed to its development and ongoing improvement.
- The principal demonstrates very effective instructional and organisational leadership skills and she endeavours to promote high standards in teaching and learning.
- The in-school management team collaborate effectively and carries out its duties in an enthusiastic manner.
- The quality of whole-school planning is very good and the approaches to implementing and monitoring the DEIS action plan are highly commended.
- Pastoral care of pupils is of a high standard and this is manifested in the positive, supportive and very respectful learning environment.
- The quality of teaching is very good. Highly effective methodologies and good differentiation strategies are in evidence throughout the school.
- Is inmholta mar atá suim á spreagadh i bhfoghlaím na Gaeilge agus mar a bhaineann na daltaí taitneamh as í a fhoghlaím. (*It is praiseworthy that pupils' interest in the learning of Irish is stimulated and that they enjoy the learning experience*).
- It is commendable that high expectations in a holistic learning environment are set for pupils.
- Pupils are courteous, confident and enthusiastic learners.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs should be coordinated in a holistic way with specific roles for all personnel and models of in-class support should be further explored.
- It is recommended that strategies be devised to facilitate the establishment of a parents' association.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

# **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 and school staff welcome the findings and recommendations of the whole school evaluation report. As Chairperson, on behalf of the whole school community, I would like to thank the Inspectorate for the helpful and professional manner in which the WSE was conducted and for the positive affirmation of the work and ethos 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 B.O.M. are happy to accept both recommendations in the report and will use them for continuous school development.

- The Learning Support team has devised a new planning template to coordinate provision for pupils with special needs in a holistic way. We will continue to provide support to pupils within the class setting and promote this strategy throughout the school.
- We will continue to work with and support our existing parents group and facilitate the establishment of a parents' association in the school.
- Since the WSE, we have set up our school website at [www.stcatherinessenior.com](http://www.stcatherinessenior.com)