

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

O'Connell Primary School (Scoil Uí Chonail)
North Richmond Street, Dublin 1
Uimhir rolla: 17881G

Date of inspection: 15 September 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

O'Connell Primary School (Scoil Uí Chonaill), situated in Dublin 1, caters for boys from second to sixth class and includes one special class for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The school is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school participates in Band 1 of the School Support Programme for Delivering Equality of Opportunity to Schools (DEIS). Currently, there are 153 pupils enrolled in the school, including a significant number for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Although attendance levels for most pupils are generally good, poor attendance by a small minority gives cause for concern. The school is actively pursuing a multi-agency approach to address this challenge. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Drama was evaluated. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The quality of school management is very good. The board is highly commended for its engagement in the school self-evaluation process.
- The principal is highly committed. His strong leadership is characterised by earnestness and skill in creating a positive learning environment.
- The school has engaged in robust self-evaluation. This work is impacting meaningfully on the school improvement process.
- Pupils exhibited exemplary behaviour during the evaluation. Very effective systems of behaviour management are implemented throughout the school.
- The quality of teaching in Mathematics is very good.
- Teachers demonstrate a high level of insight and an appropriate awareness of pupils' needs.
- Teaching in support settings is exemplary.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board should review the enrolment and admissions policy of the school to ensure that it coheres with relevant legislation in respect of the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs.
- The inclusion of greater detail in teachers' individual long-term planning in respect of exact content will contribute to ensuring progression in learning more fully.
- The implementation of a progressive oral language programme is recommended in Irish and English.

3. Quality of School Management

- The quality of school management is very good. The board of management performs its duties effectively. Meetings are convened appropriately, minutes are maintained and accounts are audited. Records indicate that the board pays assiduous attention to child protection issues and show that the board is well informed about the standards of pupil attainment in the school. The board is involved in the shaping of school policy and is highly commended for its engagement in the school self-evaluation process.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. The principal is highly committed and demonstrates great dedication to the school's mission statement. His strong and affirming leadership is characterised by earnestness and skill in creating a positive and child-centred learning environment. He is ably supported by an in-school management team whose members work collaboratively to provide leadership across a range of curricular, pastoral and administrative domains. Communication among in-school management and staff is open and positive, contributing to very good staff relations in the school.
- The quality of the management of resources is very good. The school building, grounds and classroom learning environments are maintained to a high standard. The external play areas provided for the pupils' recreation, and the degree of supervision by staff in these play areas, are praiseworthy. Most pupils in third to sixth classes, who completed a questionnaire as part of the evaluation, stated they feel safe in the school playground.
- The quality of home-school communication is very good. The school communicates effectively with parents through the use of the website, regular newsletters and through informal group meetings of parents in school. A very effective programme of induction meetings for parents of new pupils is organised annually. The Parents' Association meets regularly and provides valuable support to the school. All of the parents, who completed a questionnaire as part of the evaluation, stated that they feel welcome in the school. Almost all of the parents stated that they know who to talk to in the school if they have a problem and that they are satisfied with the arrangements for the parent-teacher meetings. All of the parents agreed that the school is well run. A few parents expressed some doubt regarding their knowledge of the content of the school's Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy. This should be explored further by the school.
- Pupils exhibited exemplary behaviour during the evaluation. Very effective systems of behaviour management, which include the promotion of positive behaviour and Discipline for Learning (DFL), have been implemented. All school interactions observed were distinguished by respect, courtesy and cooperation. Almost all of the parents felt that discipline was good in the school. A very high percentage of parents were confident that if their child experienced bullying the school would act effectively.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A competent school plan has been compiled containing a range of organisational and curricular policies. Most policies confirm the dates of ratification and anticipated review but a small number are undated and unsigned. It is recommended that these omissions be rectified. The board should review the enrolment and admissions policy of the school to ensure that it coheres with relevant legislation in respect of the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs.
- The implementation and impact of school planning and self-evaluation are commendable although some possibilities for improvement exist. The school has prepared a comprehensive DEIS plan which outlines specific targets and actions in a range of priority areas. The school has engaged in robust self-evaluation with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy. A high-quality school self-evaluation report and detailed school improvement plan have been

collaboratively prepared. This work is having a meaningful impact on the school improvement process.

- Teachers' understanding of the importance of ensuring appropriate coverage across the curriculum is evident from long-term classroom planning. The current format of long-term planning is overly brief, however, to fully support progression in learning and to align with Rule 126 (amended) of the Rules for National Schools. The inclusion of greater detail in respect of exact content, within topics being planned, will contribute to ensuring progression in learning and is needed to enable short-term planning build more effectively on previous learning. At present teachers' short-term planning and monthly progress records are combined. To most usefully aid the monitoring of progression in learning, the use of a separate whole-school template for monthly progress records which outlines concise detail of pupils' learning outcomes should be considered.
- 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

- Tá obair shásúil ar siúl i réimsí faoi leith de sholáthar na scoile don Ghaeilge, go mórmhór i gcurtha chuige machnamhacha agus dúthracht na muinteoírí, ach baineann scóip chun forbartha maidir le forchéimniú na foghlama sna daltaí san obair ó bhéal. Léiríonn na daltaí dearfach i leith na teanga agus ghlac siad páirt go fonnmhar sna gníomhaíochtaí a ullmhaíodh dóibh. I measc na gcleachtas ab fhearr a breathnaíodh leag oidí béim ar aithris agus athrá ar fhrásaí iomlána, abairtí bunúsacha a struchtúru agus baineadh úsáid bhreá as acmhainní, an TFC san áireamh, mar thaca ag comhrá a chruthú. Níl forbairt chuí, áfach, ar an leibhéal dúshláin ó rang go rang. Bíonn na daltaí ag obair laistigh de réimse teoranta de bhriathra dá dheasca agus tá sé ar a gcumas níos mó a bhaint amach. Moltar tabhairt faoi córas céimnithe a chur ar bun d'úsáid na mbriathra a mhúineadh, agus tacú le daltaí chun abairtí níos deacra a úsáid, chun a cinntiú go mbíonn forbairt chuí ar chomhrá suas tríd an scoil. Is ar shleachta sna téacsleabhair a bhunaítear an léitheoireacht go mórmhór. Ní mór sleachta de dheardh na n-oidí bunaithe ar thimpeallacht na ndaltaí, agus fíorleabhair agus acmhainní tacaíochta a úsáid chun muinín na ndaltaí sa léitheoireacht a spreagadh a thuilleadh. Léiríonn cóipleabhair na ndaltaí go dtugtar faoi ghníomhaíochtaí scríbhneoireachta feidhmiúla a dhéanamh. D'fhéadfaí anois tuilleadh béime a chur ar scríbhneoireacht i raon níos leithne seánraí. *Satisfactory work is happening in relation to specific areas of the school's provision for Irish, mostly evident in the reflective teaching approaches and the hard work of teachers, but scope for development remains in respect of the progression of pupils' learning in oral Irish work. Pupils display a positive disposition to the language and partook with enthusiasm in the learning activities prepared for them. Among the best practices seen were the emphasis teachers placed on recitation and repetition of complete phrases, the good emphasis on structuring basic sentences and good use was made of resources, ICT included, as a support to creating conversation. There isn't sufficient development of the level of challenge up through the classes, however. The pupils are operating within a limited range of verbs and are capable of achieving more. A graded programme of teaching the use of verbs, and supporting pupils in using more difficult sentences, is recommended so that there is a progressive development in Irish conversation up through the school. The activities in reading are mainly based on passages from textbooks. Passages composed by the teachers themselves about the pupils' environment and real books with supporting resources, should be used to further encourage pupils' confidence in Irish reading. Copybooks show that functional writing exercises are undertaken. Writing in more genres could now take place.*
- The overall quality of teaching and pupil achievement in English is commendable. The school has successfully promoted a reading culture through the provision of an excellent library and the implementation of initiatives designed to improve reading ability and attitudes. The success achieved in differentiating reading material to pupils' abilities is praiseworthy. Through the use of a worthwhile whole-school initiative, the pupils write regularly in a wide variety of genres. A

very effective approach to the development of spelling strategies is reinforced throughout the school. An analysis of the available evidence indicates that most pupils are achieving in line with their ability level. Notwithstanding the admirable vocabulary displayed by many pupils, there is scope to focus more explicitly on their expressive and receptive language development needs. The teachers have appropriately identified the development of pupils' oral language skills as a priority area for improvement and the introduction of a progressive, discrete oral language programme for all pupils is recommended. A commendable range of assessment practices is in use with good records maintained of pupils' attainment in standardised assessments.

- The quality of teaching in Mathematics is very good. Features of effective practice included the sharing of specific learning objectives and the clear explanation of concepts. Careful attention is paid to the development of pupils' understanding of mathematical language. A suitable emphasis is placed on mental arithmetic and the development of fluency with number facts. Where the very best practice was observed, frequent opportunities were provided for pupils to engage in the resolution of collaborative, multi-stage problems. Such emphasis on the development of pupils' mathematical thinking is praiseworthy and should be consistently promoted. An analysis of standardised test results indicates that pupil attainment is surpassing ability levels. Almost all parents reported that the school is helping their child to progress in Mathematics. Pupil questionnaires indicate that most pupils feel they are doing well in the subject.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Drama is very good. The teachers successfully create a safe environment through the use of cooperative games and the implementation of drama contracts. A broad range of drama strategies including hot-seating and mime enables pupils to enter into the fictional world with ease. Many examples of meaningful integration between drama and other curriculum areas were observed. Annual concerts and biennial musicals provide valuable opportunities for pupils to engage in performance drama.
- The quality of overall teaching and learning is very good. Teachers demonstrate a high level of insight and an appropriate awareness of pupils' needs. In almost all settings, lessons are purposeful and pitched with very good levels of challenge to enable successful learning. Teachers' preparation of differentiated resources to scaffold pupils' learning is praiseworthy. The use of individual whiteboards during the phase of concept acquisition is particularly effective. Most pupils attend well during lessons and through the effective use of well-structured group activities, high levels of engagement are facilitated.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is commendable. There are many examples of planning incorporating time-bound, measurable learning targets. It is good practice that achievement criteria are included in the school's common format for individual education plans (IEP). Overall, there remains scope to improve some target setting. Some targets are phrased as broad goals, or as strategies. They need to be more measurable, with separate success criteria, to readily confirm achievement of targets and progression towards achieving goals.
- The teaching observed in support settings was exemplary. The in-class support provision is very valuable. Lessons evaluated were well-structured and concepts were explained clearly. It is now advocated that activities and interventions be linked more explicitly with baseline assessment data. The use of some further diagnostic tests should also be considered. Lessons observed in the special class for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) were conducted effectively. Clear questioning by the teacher and effective use of available resources were evident. Well-structured small group work facilitated social interaction. The teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) are deeply respectful of the pupils' needs. The SNAs work conscientiously under the guidance of teachers and contribute greatly to pupils' experiences in school.

- A practice of deploying part of a support teaching post for purposes other than support teaching, as happened in the last school year, is an inappropriate interpretation of Circular 02/05 and should not be continued.
- The quality of home-school partnership is praiseworthy. The home-school community liaison (HSCL) coordinator works effectively to ensure that a focused range of supports is provided for pupils and families.