

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Freastogail Muire
Killahan, Abbeydorney,
Co. Kerry
Uimhir rolla: 17915U**

Date of inspection: 30 September 2013



1. Introduction

Scoil Freastogail Muire, is a mainstream, co-educational, Catholic school situated in Killahan which is six kilometres north of the village of Abbeydorney in Co Kerry. The school participates in the rural strand of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative and currently has an enrolment of twenty-five pupils in mainstream classes and 5 pupils who attend an early intervention facility for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Pupil attendance is very good. The school has a staffing of a teaching principal who works in a combined learning-support and resource teaching post, three mainstream classroom teachers, two of whom work in a job-sharing capacity and a teacher in the ASD special class. The board of management of the school 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 supportive of the work of the school.
- The school enjoys high levels of support amongst the parent body.
- The pupils are courteous and very well behaved.
- Good to very good lessons were observed in the curriculum areas evaluated.
- In general, good levels of pupil attainment were noted in the subjects evaluated.
- Staff in the ASD classroom work very hard in assisting pupils to achieve their potential.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- It is recommended that members of the board of management engage in further training to ensure that the operating procedures of the board are aligned more closely with the best practice guidelines contained in the Catholic Primary School Manager's Association (CPSMA) handbook.
- It is recommended that aspects of the school's child protection procedures be reviewed to ensure full compliance with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.
- A more strategic approach to the management of whole-school curricular, organisational and administrative issues should be adopted.
- To enhance pupil learning outcomes, it is recommended that more emphasis be placed on assessment in Irish, extending the range of problem solving activities in Mathematics and on broadening the range of poetry explored in Irish and English.
- It is recommended that a systematic review of the provision for pupils attending learning-support and resource teaching be undertaken with a view to ensuring that assessment data informs the development of specific and measurable learning targets for pupils that

are evaluated and updated at agreed intervals.
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3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted and is supportive of the work of the school. The time and attention that the board has devoted to significant financial issues in the school is acknowledged. However, it is recommended that members of the board of management engage in further training to ensure that the operating procedures of the board are aligned more closely with the best practice guidelines contained in the CPSMA handbook. In particular, records of board meetings should reflect the consideration given to key issues such as child protection updates, the appointment of officers to the board, the ratification of school policies and reports and updates from the principal and treasurer. The financial reports from the treasurer should include a clear account of income and expenditure in the school and clearly demonstrate how income received for specific purposes such as DEIS grants and grants for the ASD classroom are used for the intended purposes.
- The principal of the school has a good knowledge and understanding of the school community and enjoys positive levels of support amongst the parent body. The teaching and administrative duties inherent in the post of a teaching principal are presenting challenges in the school and it is recommended that the principal adopt a more strategic approach to managing these issues. The principal is supported by the deputy principal and the special-duties teacher. The range of duties assigned to these posts reflects the curricular interests of the teachers and the organisational needs of the school. A structure for the annual review of curricular, organisational and pastoral duties associated with these posts is recommended to ensure their ongoing relevance to the current and emerging priorities in the school.
- A good range of concrete manipulatives and information and communication technology (ICT) is available and utilised effectively in classrooms. While the school is generally cleaned and maintained to a satisfactory standard, ventilation of the multi-sensory room attached to the ASD class requires attention. Three special needs assistants (SNAs) are currently working with pupils in the ASD class and they make a valuable contribution to the inclusion and care of pupils.
- The school enjoys a very positive relationship with parents. Parent-teacher meetings are held annually and end-of-year pupil reports are issued. Parents engage in a range of fundraising initiatives and also provide transport to various school-related activities. It is recommended that the parents' association considers affiliating to the National Parents Council. Responses to questionnaires issued to parents reflect very high levels of satisfaction with the school.
- The pupils in the school are very well behaved. They are cooperative and respectful in their interactions with teachers and their peers. Responses to questionnaires issued to pupils during the evaluation are very positive with regard to all aspects of school life.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- A comprehensive process of updating and developing the curricular and organisational policies has been undertaken in the school in the recent past. It is recommended that a strategic approach to the ongoing review of whole-school planning documents be

developed and mechanisms to ensure collaboration with the education partners be embedded in this process. It is further recommended that the board of management engage in a process of formally adopting the current whole-school planning and policy documents. The school participates in the rural strand of the DEIS programme. Updating the DEIS action plan should be addressed as a priority. Preliminary work on gathering and analysing evidence has been undertaken as part of the school self evaluation process. Expressing targets in the draft school improvement plan in terms of advancements in pupils learning outcomes is recommended.

- All teachers prepare long and short-term planning to support their teaching. In general, plans are detailed and guide the implementation of the curriculum in the multi-class environments. Monthly progress reports comprise collections of short-term plans. Examples of planning templates that facilitate ease of tracking and monitoring of curriculum implementation were a feature of provision in some classes. It is advised that an enhanced focus is placed on the continued development of the school planning process to ensure that a closer alignment between whole-school planning, classroom planning and teaching and learning is achieved.

Child protection policy and procedures

- While signed confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification, it was noted during the evaluation that the Stay Safe programme is not currently being implemented in the school, and the child protection policy has not been reviewed by the board since February 2012. It is recommended that these issues be addressed as an immediate priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Well structured lessons and a variety of teaching methodologies were employed effectively in the curriculum areas observed. ICT was used to good effect to enhance the presentation of lessons and good quality pupil engagement was secured in all learning activities.
- Sa Ghaeilge, tá scileanna éisteachta agus tuisceana na ndaltaí go maith i gcoitinne. Múintear foclóir nua go beoga anamúil agus baintear úsáid éifeachtach as pictiúir, acmhainní tairbheacha agus cluichí cainte sa tréimhse réamhchumarsáide de cheachtanna. Tugtar áit lárnach do mhion-drámaíochtaí agus d'obair beirte chun deiseanna cumarsáide a chruthú do na daltaí. B'fhiú anois áfach, béim sa bhreis a chur ar dhánta agus amhráin a fhoghlaim sna ranganna uile. Tá gá freisin aird sa bhreis a dhíriú ar an ngramadach go mórmhór sna méanranganna agus sna hardranganna. Cé go n-úsáidtear scéim tráchtála chun na scileanna léitheoireachta a fhorbairt, b'fhiú réimse níos leithne d'ábhar léitheoireachta a sholáthar. Tá samplaí maithe de scríbhneoireacht sna cóipleabhair agus ar na ballaí. Chun tabhairt faoi na dea-chleachtais i múineadh na Gaeilge a fhorbairt, moltar breis béime a chur ar mheasúnú suimitheach agus ar mheasúnú foirmitheach san ábhar seo ar bhonn scoil uile.

In Irish, pupils listening and comprehension skills are generally good. Vocabulary is taught in a engaging manner through effective use of resources and games. Pair work and drama are central features of provision to enhance pupils' communication skills. It is advised that an additional emphasis be placed on poetry and songs in all classes. In addition to this there is a need to devote further attention to grammar, particularly in the middle and senior classes. While commercial schemes are used to advance pupils reading skills, the provision of a broader range of reading material is advised. Good samples of

pupils writing were noted in copybooks and on the walls. To further develop the provision for Irish, it is advised that greater attention be devoted to summative and formative assessment in this subject throughout the school

- Good quality teaching and learning was observed in the provision for English. Pupils' oral language skills are developed through discrete provision and through talk and discussion across a range of themes and topics. Phonics and phonological awareness skills are taught effectively and pupils' reading skills are developed incrementally through engagement with graded texts and age-appropriate novels. Good quality samples of written work in a range of genres were observed on classroom displays and in copybooks.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed in Mathematics was of a good standard. Oral mathematical activities, with a focus on developing key mathematical language, were noteworthy features of the lessons observed. Concrete materials were utilised to good effect to enhance pupil learning. To further develop current provision, it is recommended that an enhanced emphasis be placed on the provision of opportunities for pupils to engage in a broader range of problem solving activities with a view to further developing pupils' critical thinking skills and deepening their understanding of mathematical concepts and processes.
- The quality of teaching and pupil engagement in Physical Education was of a high standard. All lessons observed were well structured and high levels of productive pupil participation were evident in a range of well structured activities. External tutors are retained to deliver aspects of the programme. While a broad programme of activity is generally pursued in the school, the strands of dance and outdoor adventure activities could receive greater attention in some classes. It is recommended that greater attention be devoted to monitoring and recording of pupil learning outcomes in this curricular area.

Pupils' progress is assessed regularly using standardised tests in literacy and numeracy, teacher-designed tests and tasks and some generic checklists. It is recommended that the school develop a comprehensive assessment policy which is in line with *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum Guidelines for Schools*.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- There is significant scope for development in the planning and provision for learning support and resource teaching. Support is delivered through the withdrawal of pupils from their classrooms for individual and small group tuition. There is a need to systematically review timetabling for learning support to ensure it accords with the instructional requirements of the teaching day. The range of models that are currently in use should be extended to include an emphasis on early intervention initiatives and in-class support. While records are maintained of the general work that has been addressed with pupils attending for support, there is a need to engage in a more rigorous process of planning to address pupils' needs. This process should include the administration of diagnostic tests, where appropriate, with a view to setting specific and measurable learning targets for pupils that are evaluated and updated at agreed intervals. Pupil's progress in special education should be systematically tracked and monitored on an ongoing basis. As the school does not have an allocation of learning-support and resource teaching hours equivalent to a whole-time teaching post, it is recommended that decisions regarding the allocation of staff to this teaching post be reviewed in accordance with the provisions of circular 0034/2007 and circular 17/00.
- Five pupils attend the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) class. The quality of teaching in this setting is generally good. Varying levels of productive pupil participation are secured

in a range of well-structured tasks which are undertaken at individual work stations. Pupils' awareness of each other is fostered in group sessions and participation in activities such as games involving turn-taking promotes social interaction. Visual timetables and work-schedules are a feature of practice and activities provide opportunities for language development and the advancement of fine and gross motor skills. In general, pupil behaviour is well managed. However, in some circumstances consideration should be given to the development of functional management programmes with a view to analysing the communicative functions of particular behaviours. Summary profiles are prepared for all pupils and the tracking of pupils' progress in achieving learning targets is generally good. Monthly progress records are systematically maintained. Aligning these reports more closely to the social, emotional, behavioural and curricular targets in IEPs is recommended. Colour schemes and limited displays in classrooms ensure there is minimal distraction in the learning environments. However attention should be devoted to improving the acoustic conditions in the classrooms.

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 Staff welcome the positive affirmation of teaching and learning in our school. We are also very pleased that the report has acknowledged the very high level of satisfaction registered by parents.

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 are phasing in the recommendations of the report and we look forward to including them in our system of self-evaluation.