

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní)
Blanchardstown, Dublin 15
Uimhir rolla: 18047C

Date of inspection: 9 March 2014



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

1. Introduction

Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní) is a single-sex school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. In line with its mission statement, the school promotes a Catholic ethos which is exemplified in its caring, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Three-quarters of the 321 pupils enrolled speak English as an additional language (EAL). While overall attendance levels are good, the rate of absenteeism of a number of pupils gives cause for concern. It is recommended that the school devise strategies to encourage attendance as required under Section 22 of the *Education Welfare Act* (2000). During the whole-school evaluation inspectors observed teaching and learning in seven mainstream class settings and three 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 board of management and parent body actively support the work of the school.
- The school building presents as a comfortable, spacious and stimulating learning environment.
- The school has very successfully integrated pupils from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- Standards of pupil behaviour and discipline are very good.
- The quality of whole-school curriculum planning is very good.
- Teachers are empowered to undertake additional professional responsibilities and these are carried out diligently and conscientiously.
- The quality of pupils' learning is very good.
- Tá caighdeán an-mhaith á bhaint amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. (*A very good standard is achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish*)

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Assessment for learning practices should be developed further and a whole-school policy on assessment should be devised.
- Teachers' short-term planning should be consistently informed by curriculum objectives.
- The needs of pupils in receipt of additional supports should be clearly established through assessment, and their learning progress documented on an ongoing basis.
- The board is advised to ensure its compliance with Circular 32/2003 with regard to the retention of pupils

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management is properly constituted, meets regularly, and is clearly committed to the development of the school. The board is to be commended for the manner in which the new school building and grounds are presented. Finances are carefully managed. The board plays an active role in policy development. The board is advised to specify in its enrolment policy that Junior Infants must be four years old by a certain date in order to avoid the retention of significant numbers of pupils on a yearly basis, and to comply with Circular 32/2003.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. The principal is a very visible presence in the school. She is committed to providing a quality education for pupils and demonstrates a very good capacity to embrace and manage change. She encourages and empowers teachers to develop themselves professionally. She is ably supported by a conscientious and diligent in-school management team, who, in turn, are supported by other staff members who undertake duties in a voluntary capacity. It is recommended that the duties allocated to post-holders be formally reviewed annually so that they continue to reflect the evolving needs of the school
- The management of resources is good. The new school building is comfortable, spacious and bright. Classrooms and circulation areas are visually stimulating and support pupils' learning. Resources are used effectively by teachers to support teaching and learning. The school is advised to develop and implement a policy on staff rotation to enable staff to have exposure to teaching in a variety of mainstream and support settings. Ancillary staff carry out their duties diligently.
- Relationships and communications within the school community are very well managed. The school actively promotes parental involvement and has an enthusiastic and supportive parents' association. Parents are positively encouraged to communicate with the school about their children's learning needs and opportunities to consult with teachers are readily available. There is a great awareness of and respect for the varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds of parents and pupils.
- During the evaluation the standards of pupil behaviour and discipline were very good. Pupils were polite and courteous and were welcoming of visitors. Responses to questionnaires, administered during the evaluation, indicate that pupils are very positive about many aspects of school life. A small number of the respondents agreed that they had some say in how things are done in school. There is potential, however, to ascertain how the voice of pupils could be reflected in aspects of decision-making.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole-school curricular planning is very good. Plans are contextualised to the circumstances of the school and provide very good guidance for teachers. The quality of organisational and administrative plans is good although some need to be updated to reflect current legislation and Departmental guidelines.
- The process of school self-evaluation and a culture of self-reflection are well established. School self-evaluation is currently focussing on language development.

- All teachers provide long and short-term planning and monthly progress records. Most long-term planning is of a high quality. While some very good examples of short-term planning were observed, a consistent whole-school approach to curriculum-based, outcome-led planning is recommended in both mainstream and support settings.
- 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

- Some highly commendable teaching was observed. This was characterised by effective planning which was based on pupils' needs, excellent classroom management, highly skilled teaching and the delivery of well-structured and well-paced lessons. In a few cases an overreliance on talk and discussion as a preferred methodology should be addressed in favour of more participative methodologies. The identification and explicit teaching of language specific to various curricular areas is also recommended. Almost all pupils agreed that teachers explain concepts clearly and that they enjoy their lessons and learning. The quality of pupils' learning in all classes is very good and pupils recall their prior learning very well. The standard of pupils' written work is of a very high quality. It is commendable that pupils are encouraged to speak and write in their mother-tongues as well as in English and Irish.
- Tá caighdeán an-mhaith á bhaint amach i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Cothaítear dearcadh dearfach, spéis agus dúil i leith na teanga tríd an scoil agus is léir go bhfuil na daltaí brodúil as a gcumas sa Ghaeilge. Baineann na hoidí úsáid éifeachtach as cluichí cainte, pictiúir agus póstaer chun cumas cainte na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. Aithrisítear agus cantar réimse leathan rainn agus amhráin go muiníneach i ngach rang. Léann na daltaí le tuiscint agus le líofacht. Déantar cúram maith den scríbhneoireacht.
- *A very good standard is achieved in the teaching and learning of Irish. A positive disposition with interest and regard for the language is cultivated throughout the school and it is clear that the pupils are proud of their abilities in Irish. Effective use is made of language games, pictures and posters to develop the oral abilities of the pupils. A very good range of poems and songs are recited and sung in every class. The pupils read with understanding and fluency. Good attention is paid to writing.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good with some very good practice observed. The consistent, incremental development of reading skills and the cultivation of pupils' interest in books is commendable. The school has a well-stocked library containing books in many languages reflecting its multi-cultural population. The school has a very good approach to process writing. Pupils write in a variety of genres and have recently participated in the *We are Writers* project, publishing a compilation of their work in a number of languages. Pupils are exposed to a wide variety of poetry and are provided with opportunities to write their own poetry. The school takes an integrated approach to language development, and explores topics simultaneously in English, Irish and French in the senior classes. While some very good teaching of explicit language skills was observed, a greater focus on teaching curriculum-based oral language skills in mainstream and support settings is recommended.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good with some very good practice observed. The teachers explain concepts clearly, good use is made of concrete resources, and pupils' skills are developed through appropriate

learning activities. Concepts are linked to everyday experiences, and pupils show good understanding of key concepts covered. Effective whole-school approaches to problem-solving are being implemented. In questionnaires, the majority of pupils expressed confidence in their progress in Mathematics.

- There is good quality teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The school aims to provide a nurturing, child-centred atmosphere where each child is cared for and respected, and the school motto is 'Let us treat others as we would like them to treat us.' Almost all pupils are aware of school rules regarding bullying and have learned about different types of bullying. SPHE provision is supported by the delivery of the Stay Safe, Walk Tall, Be Safe and RSE programmes. Pupils have a good awareness of personal safety, healthy living and good lifestyle choices. In lessons observed, talk and discussion was the predominant methodology used. The use of a wider range of methodologies, as exemplified in the SPHE guidelines, is recommended.
- All teachers maintain assessment records and some good assessment of learning was observed. In a few cases some very effective assessment for learning strategies were used. The tracking of pupils' progress in standardised tests across the duration of their time in school is highly commendable. The wider and more consistent use of assessment for learning strategies by all teachers, in addition to more widespread use of self-assessment strategies by pupils, is recommended. A whole-school policy for assessment should be devised.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- At a whole-school level, there is scope to develop the provision for support. Supports are provided for pupils in literacy, numeracy and English as an additional language. The teaching and learning observed in support settings was characterised by affirming teacher-pupil relationships. Support rooms are presented as stimulating learning environments. Going forward, a greater focus on pupils' learning needs should underpin provision. More emphasis is needed on identifying pupils' specific learning needs, devising specific strategies to address these, and documenting how pupils have progressed in their learning. A whole school approach to the implementation of supports for pupils at stage one of the continuum is also recommended. While an incremental programme of work was observed for some EAL pupils, a clear programme of work which extends pupils' expressive and receptive language skills should be implemented in all EAL settings. In reviewing the posts of responsibility, consideration should be given to allocating the coordination of additional supports for pupils to a post-holder.
- Each pupil is respected for the unique cultural and linguistic heritage she brings to the school. A book rental scheme is in place to reduce financial burdens on parents.

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 was very happy to welcome DES inspectors to Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní) during the course of the recent Whole School Evaluation.

Many of the recommendations made have already been addressed.

The Board of Management is particularly pleased that the inspectors found that a very good standard of Irish is being achieved in the teaching and learning of the Irish language in Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní). The Board sees this as an acknowledgement of the commitment and dedicated professionalism shown by our teaching staff, the motivation of our pupils and the support and co-operation of their parents. The Board of Management would also like to think that the integrated, plurilingual approach to teaching and learning detailed in our Language Policy and implemented by our staff has played no small part in this achievement.

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

Many of the recommendations made are in the process of being addressed, i.e. enrolment policy modification; establishment of pupil council; development of policy re staff rotation. Further actions are planned to deal with findings and recommendations of the inspection.