

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Brendan's Boys' National School
Artane, Dublin 5
Uimhir rolla:18360G**

Date of inspection: 20 November 2009



WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

This report has been written following a whole school evaluation of St Brendan's Boys' National School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the school as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the school. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the principal, the teachers, the school's board of management, and representatives of the parents' association. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. They interacted with pupils and teachers and examined pupils' work. They reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation, and met with various staff teams, where appropriate. Following the evaluation visits, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the staff and to the board of management. 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.

1. INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St Brendan's Boys' National School was founded in 1959. It is located on McAuley Road, Artane and caters for pupils within the greater catchment area of Coolock and Artane. It is an all-boys senior school where mainstream classes are from second up to sixth. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. Current staffing comprises an administrative principal, seven class teachers, four teachers in support roles, a home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, a teacher of Italian and three special-needs assistants. The school is in Band 2 of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion.

Currently, the school has an enrolment of 168 pupils. Enrolment has remained steady in recent years and future enrolment projections indicate a continuance of this trend. Overall, attendance levels are very good. The school has recently embarked on a commendable campaign to promote attendance and punctuality.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

2.1 Board of management

The school is capably managed by a dedicated and enthusiastic board of management. Meetings are held regularly, with minutes being recorded for all meetings. Tasks and duties pertaining to board business are delegated appropriately, building on the specific expertise of individual members. Regular updates on school accounts are furnished at meetings, with these accounts also being certified on an annual basis. Recently, the school purchased a software programme which categorises and provides regular information on school expenditure and budgeting across a variety of domains.

The board supports the work of the school in a variety of ways, which include the development of school policies, the provision of resources, the support of teachers and the promotion of the school's identity and standing in the community. The board plans to make policies more available to parents and to further develop its communication structures with the wider school community. Its members stated that it was satisfied with the manner in which the curriculum is taught and with the achievement of its pupils. The board actively encourages the provision of a broad and

varied educational experience for its pupils. To this end, a number of after-school activities have been organised which include Spanish, judo, chess, athletics, soccer and Gaelic football. The support of the parents' association in this regard is much valued by the board. Looking towards the future, the board aims to continue the development of the school as a happy place to learn. It also plans to further develop its provision for pupils with special educational needs and to expand its resource provision in the area of information and communication technology.

2.2 In-school management

The school principal approaches her role in a careful, committed and enthusiastic manner. She provides strong leadership for the school, actively encouraging and empowering staff to develop learning programmes and setting such development within strong norms of pastoral care. In particular, the principal actively sets out to create and develop a warm and nurturing school climate which values the unique identity of each child while also striving to build and nourish their confidence as learners. She is keenly aware of school standards across all domains and the necessity for vigilance in their maintenance.

Supporting the principal is an enthusiastic and dedicated in-school management team. This team meets very regularly on both a formal and informal basis. It communicates effectively with school staff and the wider school community and seeks to respond to the needs and challenges of the school on both a day-to-day basis and within a long-term strategic framework. A strong spirit of cooperation and collaboration exists both within and beyond the team, serving to empower the wider school community. Duties of various team members are decided in consultation with school staff and with reference to the needs of the school at particular junctures. These duties cover a broad range of pastoral, organisational and curricular responsibilities. It is recommended that in the next review of duties attaching to posts, curricular leadership in the areas of Gaelic and English be re-examined.

2.3 Management of resources

The school is located on a large site which has a number of lawns, flower beds and trees which lend considerably to the aesthetic value of the school. This site has two soccer pitches, two Gaelic football pitches, a peace garden and a vegetable garden. All of these resources are used by pupils and serve as important sources of both curricular and pastoral learning. The school also has a large general-purposes hall, a computer area and a school library.

In recent years, the school has been very proactive in augmenting resources to support teaching and learning, most notably in the field of information and communication technology. In particular, the acquisition of five interactive whiteboards and the establishment of a coding system for all school resources deserve specific mention. This coding system will serve as an important and useful tool in the further development of the school's resource room and library. The school has compiled, on disc, a broad selection of curricular resources, school plans and policies for use by teaching staff. Such an initiative is commended. To complement this initiative, it is recommended that the school establishes a more accessible and structured depot to store school resources suitable for the various curricular areas and associated strands.

The school encourages teachers to gain experience in a variety of teaching contexts. It has a class allocation policy. It is recommended that this policy be further developed to formalise the current informal good practices in relation to staff rotation. School staff members regularly engage in professional development courses which promote an important and diverse reservoir of expertise and knowledge. The school actively encourages staff to share and disseminate their learning from these courses. The school benefits from the committed and dedicated services of a secretary, four cleaners and two caretakers.

2.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

The school communicates regularly with parents via newsletters, fliers, memos and the school website. On occasion, it also publishes notices and items of interest in the parish newsletter *Le Chéile*. The school is anxious to address and respond to parental concerns and queries in an expedient and professional manner. Parent-teacher meetings are held in term one of each academic year. Pupils receive a written report on their progress in both the first and third terms each year. The school is commended for this conscientious effort to provide regular written feedback to parents.

The school is supported by an energetic and dynamic parents' association. Meetings are held regularly. The parents' association is engaged in a variety of activities to support the work of the school. These include involvement in paired reading, sports day activities, fundraising, the organisation of sacramental celebrations, financial support for the procurement of resources and the organisation of an annual school barbecue. The association stated that it is satisfied with the caring attitude of teachers and pupils and acknowledged the school's awareness of the necessity to develop pupils in a holistic manner. It plans to build stronger links with the board of management in the future.

2.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils in this school is of a very high standard. Pupils are content and cooperative displaying knowledge and respect for school rules and procedures. Staff interact respectfully and warmly with pupils who reciprocate in a similar manner. A climate of good organisation, order and efficiency prevails.

3. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

3.1 School planning process and implementation

The quality of school planning is very good. School plans and policies are created in a collaborative manner with parents, teachers, *cuiditheoirí* from the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS) and other relevant professionals being consulted where appropriate. The school has established a very clear and specific three-year action plan to guide and direct the scope and focus of its future school-development activities. The school is commended on this action plan which is very well constructed. The current school plan comprises curricular, organisational and specific DEIS plans. The school has created a very extensive selection of organisational policies. These policies are specific and practical and make very good provision for the effective and orderly execution of a variety of organisational practices.

While parents are consulted on the development of plans and policies via the parents' association, it is recommended that the school investigates approaches to making curricular and organisational plans and policies more accessible to the general parent body. A number of school plans contain a date of review and ratification; it is recommended that all school plans contain a date of review and ratification. It is also recommended that the school reviews its enrolment policy to accommodate some of its recent adjustments in relation to provision for pupils with special educational needs. The school has a comprehensive positive behaviour policy and a very detailed policy on suspension and dismissal. It is recommended that both of these policies be amalgamated to form a single policy on behaviour. It is recommended that the homework policy be reviewed. Curricular plans are in place for all curricular areas. These plans are very comprehensive in

design, scope and content. They provide clear and useful guidelines for the implementation of the curriculum.

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.

3.2 Classroom planning

Overall, the quality of classroom planning is very good. All teachers write long and short-term plans to guide teaching and learning in their classrooms. These plans make very good provision for the sequential and progressional development of content. All teachers complete monthly reports. It is recommended that in the next review of such monthly reports, the school examines the template currently in use with a view to making greater provision for the more detailed recording of skills and learning outcomes.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

4.1 Overview of learning and teaching

Teaching and learning in this school occurs within a very positive, affirming and pleasant school environment. Teachers make every effort to give pupils a positive and rewarding learning experience. To this end, lessons are delivered in a very lively and stimulating manner, endeavouring to actively involve all pupils and seeking to spark their interest and pride in their own learning. Pupils show enthusiasm and interest in learning and apply themselves to their work with zeal and energy.

4.2 Language

Gaeilge

Tá plean scoile do mhúineadh na Gaeilge an-soléir agus cuimsitheach cumtha ag an scoil. Sa phlean seo, cuirtear béim inmholta ar fhorbairt scileanna teanga agus ar fhoclóir. Múintear an Ghaeilge go héifeachtach. Is léir go bhfuil suim ag na daltaí sa teanga. Glacann siad páirt ghníomhach sna ceachtanna. Baineann na hoidí úsáid as straitéisí éagsúla teagaisc chun na ceachtanna a chur i láthair. Baintear úsáid chuí as teagasc ranga, teagasc grúpa agus obair bheirte. Chomh maith le sin, tugtar deiseanna éagsúla do na daltaí chun labhairt. Is léir go bhfuil na daltaí ag baint taitneamh agus tairbhe as na himeachtaí éagsúla a éagraíonn na hoidí chun an foclóir a chleachtadh agus chun na daltaí a mhealladh chun cainte. I gcásanna áirithe, is féidir níos mó úsáid a bhaint as geáitsíocht, dramaíocht agus obair bheirte chun foclóir nua a chleachtadh. Tá stór sásúil focail ag na daltaí agus tá siad in ann labhairt go sásúil faoi ábhair éagsúla a bhaineann lena saoil. I gcásanna áirithe, baintear sár-úsáid as cluichí, scéalta agus teicneolaíocht faisnéise agus cumarsáide (TFC) chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt agus chun iad a mhealladh chun cainte. Moltar freisin mar a bhaintear úsáid as an Ghaeilge mar theanga chaidrimh i rith an lae i gcuid mhór de na ranganna. Rachadh sé chun tairbhe go mór do dhul chun cinn na Gaeilge sa scoil ach an cleachtas thuasluaite seo a leathnú tríd an scoil de réir mar is cuí. Cuirtear béim chuí ar fhilíocht agus amhráin i gcuid mhór de na ranganna. Is léir go mbaineann na daltaí taitneamh as

an ghné seo den churaclam. Moltar go gcuirfí níos mó béime ar fhilíocht agus amhráin tríd an scoil.

Cruthaítear timpeallacht Ghaeilge sa scoil seo trí phóstaeir agus lipéid chuí a thaispeáint sna seomraí ranga. Chomh maith le sin, i seomraí áirithe, tá samplaí d'obair scríofa na ndaltaí ar taispeáint. Moltar go gcuirfí breis béime ar an sort dea-chleachtas seo tríd an scoil.

Is féidir leis na daltaí cleachtaí a scríobh faoi threoir agus i bhfórmhór de na ranganna, scríobhann siad i réimsí éagsúla. I gcásanna, b'fhiú breis béime a chur ar saorscríbhneoireacht. Múintear an léitheoireacht ar bhealach struchtúrtha agus déantar gach iarracht í a chur i láthair go súimiúil agus go bríomhar. Tá na daltaí in ann léamh le brí. I gcásanna áirithe, b'fhiú níos mó béime a chur ar dhifrealú.

Irish

The school has constructed a very clear and comprehensive school plan for the teaching of Irish. In this plan, commendable emphasis is placed on the development of language skills and vocabulary. Irish is taught effectively. Pupils have an evident interest in the language. They partake actively in lessons. Teachers make use of a variety of teaching strategies to present lessons. Appropriate use of whole-class teaching, group teaching and pair work is undertaken. In addition, pupils are given various opportunities to converse. It is evident that pupils are deriving enjoyment and benefit from the various activities which the teachers organise to practise vocabulary and to encourage the pupils to converse. In some instances, greater use of actions, drama and pair work could be undertaken to practise new vocabulary. Pupils have a satisfactory store of vocabulary and they are able to converse satisfactorily about matters which relate to their own lives. In some instances, games, stories and information and communication technology (ICT) were used excellently to stimulate pupil interest and to encourage them to talk. In the majority of classrooms, the manner in which Irish is used as a medium of communication is also praiseworthy. It would greatly improve the progress of Irish throughout the school if the aforementioned practice was extended throughout the school as appropriate. In most classrooms, appropriate emphasis is placed on poetry and songs. It is apparent that pupils enjoy this aspect of the curriculum. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on poetry and signing throughout the school.

Through the use of posters and appropriate labels in various classrooms, an Irish environment is created. In addition, in certain classrooms, pupils' written work is on display. It is recommended that increased emphasis be placed on such commendable practice throughout the school.

In some instances, additional emphasis could be placed on free writing. Reading is taught in a structured manner and every effort is made to present it in a lively and interesting way. Pupils can read with meaning. In some instances, it would be worthwhile to place additional emphasis on differentiation.

English

Teaching of English is of a good standard. As part of the school's development plan, the *First Steps Programme* is being instituted on a phased basis in the school with a particular focus on the development of oral language skills. An integrated approach, focusing on vocabulary development and extension, is a feature of teachers' preparation.

In the main, a graded reading scheme is selected as the core reading material at individual class level. To cater for the wide range of reading abilities and to scaffold pupils in the acquisition of reading fluency and confidence, consideration should be given to supplementing this scheme with

graded parallel reading material. Phonological awareness and structural analysis are carried out during teaching and learning. The display of frequently used words, prefixes, suffixes, and polysyllabic words to help to develop word-identification strategies is in evidence in some classrooms. The extension of this approach is recommended at a whole-school level. The development of higher-order thinking skills is facilitated in a number of classes and should be further emphasised as part of the literacy development of all pupils in all classes.

Pupils are encouraged to select personal reading material from the class and the school library. It was noted during the evaluation that some teachers track and record this personal reading for each pupil. It is recommended that this commendable practice be shared across all classes. In the main, libraries contain a wide range of quality fiction material. The present stock of fact-based books should be further supplemented to provide a wider reading base for the majority of pupils. The approach to teaching the novel is praiseworthy in middle and senior classes. The pupils are given opportunities to respond to characters, situations and story details and in general are given broad experiences in terms of articulating a shared response to fiction.

Shared reading initiatives involving members of the local community are undertaken on a regular basis. Consideration should be given to locating this worthwhile endeavour within the pupils' own classroom to add focus and provide further assessment opportunities. A feature of practice involves senior pupils reading with junior and middle classes. This is a very creative and worthwhile approach. 'Drop Everything and Read' (DEAR) is a timetabled element of some teachers' practice and, in particular settings, there is a notable emphasis on newspaper and media studies. Planning indicates that teachers read stories to the pupils on a regular basis.

In the junior classes, a concerted approach to exploring a designated range of writing genres is in evidence. Pupils demonstrate enthusiasm and skills, particularly in relation to recount writing. In the middle and senior classes, emphasis is placed on character analysis, fictional writing and a process approach to writing by almost all teachers. In some classrooms and circulation areas, examples of pupils' writing from various genres, including narrative, recount, letters, poems, project work and fiction are displayed attractively.

Pupils' written presentation is generally good with some very carefully presented copybooks in evidence in particular settings. The school has constructed a clear and staged policy on penmanship. Some aspects of this policy have yet to be fully implemented and brought to fruition. A repertoire of poems is explored and the pupils are encouraged to respond in different ways through dramatising, miming, writing and comparing poems. The committing to memory of a selection of poems is recommended as a further approach to poetry.

Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative

The school commenced participation in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative in 1998. Their chosen language was Italian. The teaching of Italian is guided by well-constructed short and long-term planning. Italian classes are delivered in a lively manner, making very good provision for the active involvement of pupils. To this end, resources, games, songs and pair work are used to very good effect. Lesson content is suitably connected to the environment and life experience of the pupils. Pupils reveal a keen interest in the language and participate enthusiastically in lessons. Very good provision is in place for the study of Italian culture. The recent establishment of a lunchtime Italian club and plans to broaden the scope of drama activities are also very commendable.

4.3 Mathematics

The school's approach to Mathematics is guided by very considered and specific plans which align both classroom and learning-support strategies in a detailed and focused manner. This approach has been formulated in a three-year strategic overview, designed to further improve standards of attainment in Mathematics across the school. The school is highly commended for this initiative and for its endeavours to strategically address the learning needs of its pupils.

Pupils enjoy Mathematics and it is clear that teachers set out to develop their confidence and enthusiasm for the subject. Lessons are delivered in a structured, lively and engaging manner. Pupils engage in lessons with enthusiasm. They reveal pride and interest in their learning. Teachers make good provision for pupils' questions, with a number of pupils revealing a healthy interest in their learning during lessons by asking questions. Teachers respond warmly to these questions. Such practice is commended and encouraged. Lessons make very good provision for the active involvement and engagement of all pupils. Overall, lessons make very good use of resources. The school places strong emphasis on oral work and on the development of the pupils' knowledge of number facts. Pupils reveal good competency in their memorisation of such facts. In a number of instances, teachers make creative and effective provision for integration and linkage of mathematical content. In so doing they contextualise mathematical content within the life experience and environment of the pupils. It is recommended that the school investigates further approaches for the exploration, development and dissemination of such good practice. In a large number of the lessons observed, teachers made provision for collaborative learning, plenary sessions and problem-solving which provide for the co-construction of mathematical knowledge. Such activities allow pupils to interrogate and distil their mathematical understanding. It is recommended that the school investigates wider opportunities for the exploration, development and dissemination of such good practice.

Teachers make good provision for continuous assessment. In a number of instances, teachers make very good use of assessment while the Mathematics lesson is ongoing. Such practice is commended. There is scope for the further development of such practices at a whole-school level. Classrooms are well-presented as mathematics-rich environments. High quality provision has been made for the use of mathematical trails within the school environment.

4.4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education

History

A whole-school plan for History has been developed reflecting the aims and objectives of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*. For the most part, a commercially produced scheme forms the basis for curriculum provision in History. This assists in providing pupils with structured learning experiences, in providing guidance for classroom teachers and in further ensuring the provision of a broad and balanced menu curriculum. The delineation of content for each class level should be included within the whole-school plan.

In the lessons observed, teachers were successful in stimulating pupils' interest in aspects of the strand *Early People and Ancient Societies*. There is evidence from classroom planning and from progress records that some teachers seek to enrich this provision by investigating some aspects of personal and family history. Story is used well as a methodology by all teachers to develop an understanding of the lives of people in the past. In the junior classes, stories are carefully selected to develop an understanding of time and chronology and empathy with people's lives. Time lines, active-learning methodologies such as interviews, the use of artefacts and supplementary sources of information are features of practice documented in the progress records of some teachers. It is recommended that these active methodologies should be further discussed at whole-school level

with a view to sharing the variety of approaches evident in some classrooms. In support of these active methodologies, consideration should also be given to the development of a school museum as a basis for the investigation of aspects of life in the past. A variety of project work was undertaken to celebrate the school's recent fiftieth anniversary. This is of a good standard. Investigative projects based on historical themes are identified by some teachers to stimulate pupils' interest in History.

ICT is used creatively as a teaching and learning resource in some classrooms. History lessons are effectively integrated with Drama and English. In particular, novels are creatively and effectively used to further explore the strand *Eras of Change and Conflict*.

Geography

In Geography, whole-school planning provides for the development of a range of skills and concepts as the three strands of the geography curriculum are explored. A commercially produced scheme provides a broadly based foundation for the work in classrooms and this is enhanced by the judicious use of globes, maps and photographs. Consideration should now be given to detailing the content selected for each class level and including this within the whole-school plan for Geography.

Planning and progress records indicate that aspects of the physical geography of Ireland, Europe and the wider world are explored. In the lessons observed, pupils demonstrate an enthusiasm in their learning and exhibit a very good understanding of the content they have studied. As resources allow, the provision of a broader range of investigative resources is recommended to facilitate skills development and recording in the pupils' own environment.

Participation in the Green Schools Initiative successfully develops a sense of environmental awareness at school and local level. To bring this approach to local studies to greater fruition, the development of a trail within the attractive school grounds would further support the programme of work delivered within classrooms.

Further planning for an integrated approach within Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) is recommended. Pupils' progress in Geography is monitored through teacher observation and questioning, the completion of tasks by the pupils and through their involvement in project work in some classrooms.

Science

The school has formulated a very comprehensive and detailed school plan to guide teaching and learning in Science. Classroom planning is detailed and makes suitable provision for the sequential and progressional delineation of content. It is recommended that in some instances greater reference be made to fair testing and design-and-make activities. The school makes creative use of its environment to promote and stimulate pupils' interest in Science. Through planting, harvesting and maintenance activities in the school garden, pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to develop scientific skills and to witness various scientific phenomena and principles at first hand. In addition, in a number of classrooms, there is evidence of ongoing experimentation. All classrooms are presented as science-rich environments, with some very commendable exemplars being noted during the evaluation.

The school has amassed a good selection of resources for the teaching of Science. It is recommended that the school reviews its resource provision for all strands with a view to assessing and augmenting the needs of specific aspects of the curriculum. The school is commended for the various initiatives it has undertaken in the past to promote and celebrate

Science. It invites speakers to the school, has a science club and is involved in the Science for Fun Project.

Science lessons are presented in a stimulating manner serving to engage and spark pupil enthusiasm. Pupils reveal a keen interest in scientific principles and phenomena. In some instances, the subject is creatively and very effectively integrated with other curricular areas. Teachers make use of whole-class teaching and collaborative learning activities. They make good use of resources and pupils' ideas to present and develop lesson content. Lessons provide pupils with opportunities to engage in hands-on activities and to experiment. In so doing, suitable provision is in place for the development of the pupils' skills in observing, predicting, experimenting and analysing. In one particular lesson, very effective approaches to fair testing were noted. It is recommended that the school investigates opportunities for the dissemination of such effective and creative practices.

4.5 Arts Education

Visual Arts

Delivery of the Visual Arts curriculum is guided by a very comprehensive and detailed school plan. Every Christmas, pupils design and create their own Christmas cards which serve to celebrate the festival and offer opportunities for pupils to display their work to the wider school community. The school itself is presented in a very colourful and aesthetically pleasing manner. High quality samples of the pupils' work in Visual Arts across a range of strands are on display throughout the general school environment. The school has a good selection of resources but there is some scope for the further development of these resources, particularly in the area of *Looking and Responding*.

Pupils reveal interest in Visual Arts and discuss pieces of their work with pride and enthusiasm. The visual arts lessons observed during the evaluation made very good provision for the active involvement of all pupils and for the creative integration of Visual Arts with a range of other subjects, most notably Science and Geography. Very good provision was in place for the use of ICT and a range of other stimuli to spark the pupils' interests and imaginations and to prompt them to explore, to experiment and to express themselves through art. Pupils clearly enjoyed this process.

Music

Guided by a comprehensive and detailed school plan, the quality of teaching and learning in Music is very good. The school actively endeavours to stimulate pupils' interests in Music through a variety of initiatives and activities such as inviting samba drummers to the school, singing at assembly and teaching the tin whistle in a range of classes. The school has a good selection of musical instruments, but there is some potential to extend its collection of musical pieces from various traditions and styles.

Music lessons are delivered in a structured and lively manner. They make very good provision for the active involvement of pupils. Creative and suitable provision is in place to allow pupils to respond physically, verbally, emotionally and cognitively to Music. Lessons make very effective use of resources. They place good emphasis on the exploration of vocal, body and instrumental music. Creative provision is in place for composition and performance. Pupils sing a range of songs tunefully. They play the tin whistle very capably.

Drama

Teaching and learning in Drama is guided by a wide-ranging school plan. The school avails of support from Dublin City Arts Council to facilitate continuing professional development in Drama. The school also presents a Christmas play each year with parents being invited to attend performances. In a number of instances, Drama is integrated with a range of other curricular areas, most notably English and History. In some specific instances, teachers make very deliberate and creative provision for the integration of Drama with story. While a number of teachers plan discretely for Drama, it is recommended that teachers' timetables make more deliberate provision for the discrete timetabling of Drama.

The school is amassing a variety of resources to meet the needs of the various strands in the drama curriculum and is encouraged in this endeavour. Pupils engage in drama activities with enthusiasm and demonstrate a positive attitude towards it. Teachers make creative provision for the development of scenarios which stimulate the pupils' imaginations and prompt them to engage emotionally, physically and intellectually in the world of Drama. The use of group work and props assists in this regard.

4.6 Physical Education

The school has a suitably sized general-purposes room and can avail of the use of a yard and large playing pitch to the rear of the school. This facilitates the provision of the physical education (PE) programme throughout the year. PE lessons observed were delivered in a purposeful manner with teachers giving clear directions during activities. The involvement of all pupils is encouraged and in general, pupils participate in lessons with enthusiasm. Very good attention is paid to health and safety matters during lessons which are suitably planned. Good emphasis is placed on gross and fine motor skill development that is appropriate to a range of ball games and other physical activities.

The whole-school plan documents a good range of resources to support teaching. Much of the equipment currently available supports activities in athletics and games. As finances allow, a review of these resources is recommended to provide for all strands of the PE curriculum. A range of extra-curricular activities supports the PE programme. The school participates successfully in inter-schools competitions particularly Gaelic football, soccer and basketball. The services of local sporting organisations support PE provision in these areas with further support provided in the area of dance and gymnastics. There is a need to provide for greater breadth and balance in the school's PE programme with further regular emphasis on *Gymnastics* and the *Outdoor and Adventure Activities* strands of the curriculum. While aspects of the *Aquatics* strand is classroom based, there are plans in place to select a swimming pool in the local area in order to provide fully for this strand of the PE curriculum.

4.7 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

The welcoming atmosphere in the school and the evident interest of the teachers in the well-being of the pupils creates a positive climate for their personal and social development. The school places strong emphasis on intercultural education. In so doing, the uniqueness and diversity of various cultures are celebrated. To support the delivery of the SPHE curriculum, a wide range of resources and ancillary programmes is in use, such as the Walk Tall and Stay Safe programmes. In addition, outside speakers are engaged to give talks to pupils and parents on different dimensions of the curriculum such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), safety and protection, and personal hygiene.

All teachers provide discrete SPHE lessons. Elements of observed good practice include creative introductions and reflective lesson settings, good use of talk and discussion and the integration of

SPHE with other curriculum areas. Lessons are used consistently to promote good behaviour in all pupils, to advance their listening and turn-taking skills and to imbue in them a genuine respect for and tolerance of others. Assemblies are used to good effect to praise and affirm pupils, to showcase success and to highlight areas for whole-school improvement.

4.8 Assessment

The school has a well-constructed assessment policy. In the next review of this policy, it is recommended that mainstream classroom assessment practices be delineated more specifically. In addition, it is recommended that the types and functions of specific diagnostic tests be more clearly delineated in the plan. The school undertakes a wide range of testing with standardised tests being used to very good effect. Standardised tests are given to all pupils in English and Mathematics. In addition, all second-class pupils undertake the *Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT)*. Members of the special education team closely analyse the results of these tests to identify pupils in need of support and to examine learning trends in the school. At the post-evaluation meeting, the timing of the use of some of these tests was discussed. The school has decided to review the timing of the *Micra-T* and *Sigma-T* tests, postponing them to the last term of each academic year on a trial basis. In addition, in term one on their entry to second class, pupils' achievement in English and Mathematics is tested. It is recommended that the formative and summative value of such testing be re-examined bearing in mind the data received on the standardised tests from the feeder schools and from their assessment techniques. While there are merits in the school's current approach to the use of standardised testing in monitoring the success of their DEIS action plan, it is recommended that such an approach should also examine the qualitative progress of pupils over the time periods in question.

Teachers make use of a variety of assessment techniques. Such techniques include teacher observation, teacher-devised tasks and tests, work samples and portfolios. Overall, pupils' work is monitored very carefully. In a number of instances, teachers provide very specific and regular feedback on pupils' written work. As there is some variability in the forms and techniques of assessment in use by teachers, the next review of the school plan will provide a forum for the analysis and formulation of a more uniform whole-school approach to assessment.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

5.1 Pupils with special educational needs

A comprehensive whole-school policy has been put in place which underpins the provision of supplementary teaching for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). It is clear and practical and outlines the roles played by different members of the school community in teaching in support settings. The teaching staff adheres to Departmental guidelines regarding the selection of pupils for learning support. The special education team and classroom teachers demonstrate flexibility in their approach. Their work is underwritten by a concern for the best interests of their pupils. Supplementary teaching is provided in the areas of literacy, numeracy and social-skills development. The predominant mode of delivery of support teaching is on a withdrawal basis with some supplementary in-class support provided to a lesser extent. Commendably, early intervention strategies for pupils in the junior class are a priority of school policy.

There is regular liaison between support teachers and class teachers regarding pupils' progress. It is noteworthy that team members liaise both formally and informally with class teachers regarding individual pupil progress. Lessons taught by the special education team were well-structured and delivered in a very affirming manner. In relation to literacy and numeracy, teachers model strategies which focus on incremental steps in decoding and problem solving. Teachers

prepare very good quality visual resources for all teaching and especially for developing pupils' comprehension and mathematical skills. Differentiated reading material, physical and visual materials and games are used successfully to create active learning environments for pupils. The skilful use of concrete mathematical resources for concept development and consolidation was noted during the evaluation. It is recommended that this approach be further embedded as a strategy in all support settings.

For the most part, learning-support rooms are appropriately organised and well-resourced, attractive learning environments. Support rooms are generally bright, print-rich and mathematics-rich where pupils' work is displayed and celebrated. Planning in all support roles is clear with learning targets being sequenced appropriately. Individual education plans (IEPs) and individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) are prepared through suitable consultation with teachers and parents. Commendably, pupils' opinions are sought during this consultation process. Targets are reviewed twice each year. Support teachers, class teachers and the principal keep a copy of completed IEPs and IPLPs. Weekly plans are based on individual pupil targets. Three special-needs assistants work in accordance with their prescribed duties under the direction of the classroom teachers and are conscientious in promoting full inclusion, pupil independence and meeting the care needs of individual pupils.

5.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups

As part of its regular review of the success of its DEIS programme, the school recently developed a new three-year plan. This plan is both extensive and comprehensive in nature, making provision for a multi-pronged approach to DEIS. The school is commended for the breadth and scope of this plan. This new plan aims to further enhance the quality of educational provision by focusing on literacy and numeracy, by developing parental involvement in the life of the school, by promoting pupil attendance and by further developing partnerships with agencies outside of the school. This plan is to be reviewed regularly, and is underpinned by principles of collaboration and cooperation.

The home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator plays an important and effective role in the delivery of the school's DEIS action plan. The HSCL programme is extensively, carefully and strategically planned. It actively sets out to support and develop the school's action plan for DEIS in a number of ways including liaising with the parents' association, undertaking home visits to parents, providing classes for parents, promoting the school's credit union, liaising with other professionals, providing transfer to secondary school and assisting with the development of specific curricular areas. With regard to the latter, the HSCL co-ordinator is actively involved in the improvement of literacy and numeracy standards through the provision of programmes such as paired reading, shared reading, *Maths for Fun* and *Science for Fun*. In addition, specific courses relating to curricular areas such as Mathematics and Irish are being considered for delivery this year. The HSCL service is also commended for its use of ICT resources which include texting parents and utilising the school's website.

The school also receives important support from the School Completion Programme. This programme targets specific groups of pupils. It is delivered in a number of ways which include a breakfast club, lunch interventions, relaxation exercises, meditation activities, judo classes, dance classes, gardening activities and after-school activities such as Spanish and chess.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school principal and in-school management team approach their work in a dedicated and enthusiastic manner, providing strong leadership for the school community across pastoral and academic domains.
- A strong spirit of collaboration and cooperation exists in the school.
- Pupils are very content and motivated in this school.
- The school adopts a strategic, focused and progressive approach to planning.
- Teachers and other school staff demonstrate a genuine interest in and concern for their pupils.
- Lessons are delivered in a lively and structured manner, making very good provision for the active involvement of pupils.
- Pupils demonstrate interest and pride in their work.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is delivered in a warm, strategic and affirming manner.

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

- It is recommended that greater emphasis on English and Irish poetry be undertaken at a whole-school level, most especially in relation to committing poems to memory.
- It is recommended that in the next review of duties attaching to posts, greater emphasis be given to curricular leadership in the areas of Gaelge and English.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and 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 welcomes the very positive findings of the WSE report. In particular the board welcomes the inspectors' appreciation of the dedication and commitment of the school staff. It acknowledges the recognition of the hard work and good behaviour of the pupils of the school. The board wishes to thank the Inspectorate for their courtesy and professionalism. The WSE process, therefore, was a positive and affirmative experience for the whole 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 duties of the post holders have been reviewed and the curricular areas of Gaeilge and English reassigned. Both subject areas will be reviewed this academic year.