

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Náisiúnta Seosamh na mBráthar
Marino Park Avenue, Fairview, Dublin 3
Uimhir rolla: 18726W**

Date of inspection: 11 May 2015



**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

Scoil Náisiúnta Seosamh na mBráthar is an all-boys school, catering for pupils from second to sixth class. It includes three special classes, from infants to sixth class, for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (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 2 of the School Support Programme for Delivering Equality of Opportunity to Schools (DEIS), shares the services of a home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, and participates in the School Completion Programme. 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.

Currently, there are 135 pupils enrolled in the school. Although attendance levels for most pupils are generally good, poor attendance by a small minority gives cause for concern. A number of worthwhile strategies have been put in place to address this challenge. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and History was evaluated.

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The principal exemplifies excellent professional standards of leadership.
- The emphasis on collaboration and the cultivation of effective working relationships among all staff is adding to the productive working atmosphere in the school.
- The management of pupils is very good. A positive code of behaviour is in place which is reflected in the management of pupils throughout the school.
- Pupils exhibited very good behaviour during the evaluation and they present as friendly, courteous and enthusiastic learners.
- In recent years, the school has begun to engage with the self-evaluation process to excellent effect.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- Significant improvements in aspects of procedure and practice at board of management level are required as a matter of priority. In particular, the board should be constituted correctly in accordance with the *Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure* (2011).
- It is recommended that the board review the posts of responsibility to ensure that all post-holders have curricular, organisational and pastoral duties that are equitable and commensurate with their role. In particular, it is recommended that curricular responsibilities extend to impacting directly on teaching and learning.
- It is recommended that the board develop a strategic plan for the redecoration and refurbishment of the classrooms to ensure that every classroom presents as a stimulating learning environment.
- Is gá don scoil cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge a fheabhsú. *There is a need for the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Irish.*
- There is a need for greater structure to ensure that all collaborative learning approaches result in good-quality learning.

3. Quality of School Management

- The school is managed effectively, although significant improvements in aspects of procedure and practice at board of management level are required as a matter of priority. The board meets regularly and accounts are audited annually. Although minutes of the proceedings of the board are maintained appropriately, these need to be signed by the chairperson and dated. The board of management is not correctly constituted. This should be rectified immediately to ensure that the board is constituted in accordance with the *Constitution of Boards and Rules for Procedures for Boards of Management of National Schools*. The board should review the school's admissions and enrolment policy to ensure that it adheres to relevant legislation in respect of the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. It is recommended that agreed minutes of board meetings be signed. All school policies and plans should be signed and dated by the chairperson of the board on ratification. Where contrary perspectives exist between individual board members on key school issues, it is important that agreed procedures be devised and implemented for resolving these divergent perspectives. Under the leadership of the current principal, the centrality of teaching and learning to the work of the board is now recognised. It is important that this practice becomes further embedded in the work of the board.
- The quality of the work of the in-school management team is very good. The principal exemplifies excellent professional standards of leadership. Central to all her deliberations is the focus on fostering and maintaining the ethos of the school and ensuring that this ethos becomes the lived experience of each pupil in the school. The principal is supported very well by the other members of the in-school management team, who perform a broad range of assigned duties effectively. It is recommended that the board review the posts of responsibility to ensure that all post-holders have curricular, organisational and pastoral duties that are equitable and commensurate with their role. In particular, it is recommended that curricular responsibilities extend to impacting directly on teaching and learning.
- A clean and orderly school environment is evident. The board is commended for the recent redecoration and refurbishment of common areas throughout the school; it is highly commendable that, in devising this programme of work, due account was taken of pupils' perspectives. It is recommended that the board develop a plan for the redecoration and refurbishment of the classrooms to ensure that every classroom presents as a stimulating learning environment. Pupils' work is celebrated and displayed attractively in shared areas throughout the school. There is scope for teachers to consider how the display of visual resources in individual classrooms could be enhanced to develop each classroom space as a vibrant place for learning. School management should explore ways to extend the opportunities for teachers to gain appropriate experience of different grade levels and settings for the benefit of pupils. Ancillary staff members contribute significantly to the smooth running of the school.
- Particular attention is now being paid to encouraging collaboration among teachers both in terms of developing and implementing school policy. This emphasis on collaboration and the cultivation of effective working relationships among all staff is adding to the positive working atmosphere in the school. There remains, however, scope to develop current approaches for collaboration between teachers in the mainstream and the support settings.
- There is a recently established parents' association which provides valuable support to the school. It should consider affiliation with the National Parents' Council - Primary. Parents are appraised of school activities via text-a-parent services, the website, regular newsletters and through group meetings of parents in the school. Responses to parental questionnaires reveal a very positive disposition towards the school. For example, almost all parents agreed that teaching is good in the school and that their child is making good progress.

- The management of pupils is very good. A positive code of behaviour is in place which is reflected in the management of pupils throughout the school. During the evaluation, classroom management was of a very high standard throughout the school. The promotion of a positive learning environment has been identified as a key priority for school improvement in recent years. It is very commendable that this has become the lived experience of pupils in almost all learning settings. The meaningful inclusion of the pupil voice through the Green Schools initiative and the student council is highly commended. Pupils exhibited very good behaviour during the evaluation and they present as friendly, courteous and enthusiastic learners. In questionnaires, most pupils agreed that they feel content and secure in the school environment.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The quality of whole school planning is good and a wide range of organisational policies has been developed. These policies provide specific guidance on a comprehensive range of school activities and procedures. However, the plan and programmes, available for inspection, in respect of pupils retained for a repeat year at the same grade level should have been better. In line with Circular Letter 11/01, clear programmes for each pupil should be outlined that record precisely the new approach to be used and what its expected benefit will be.
- There is evidence among teachers of a collaborative approach to school planning and this is praiseworthy. This collaboration can be seen in the willingness of staff members to assume responsibility for implementing agreed changes. School policies are reflected upon and discussed on a regular basis. This considered reflection is successful in cultivating a shared understanding of policies which, in turn, is leading to effective implementation.
- In recent years, the school has begun to engage with the self-evaluation process to excellent effect. The approach is thorough and systematic. Analysis of data is wide ranging and insightful, resulting in appropriate actions for improvement which are having a demonstrable impact on pupils' learning.
- A systematic and shared approach to individual classroom planning is being adopted and this is very commendable. It is suggested that the structure of the monthly progress record be reviewed to provide a simpler, more succinct account of the work completed in class. This would facilitate school self-evaluation and allow school management to better monitor school improvement targets in teaching and learning.
- 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

- Cé gur breathnaíodh roinnt cleachtas éifeachtach i roinnt ranganna i rith na meastóireachta, is gá don scoil cáilíocht an teagaisc agus na foghlama sa Ghaeilge a fheabhsú. Léirigh na samplaí dea-chleachtais go raibh scileanna tuisceana na ndaltaí forbartha go maith, gur baineadh úsáid mhaith as rannta agus dánta chun stór foclóra a chur ina seilbh ag na daltaí agus gur léigh na daltaí le líofacht agus le tuisceant mhaith. Cuirtear béim chuí ar theanga a mhúineadh trí mhodhanna teagaisc gníomhacha a úsáid. Tá líofacht inmholta ag tromlach na n-oidí agus stiúraítear na ceachtanna go breá trí mheán na Gaeilge. Cé go dtugadh deiseanna do na daltaí obair i mbeirteanna le linn na

meastóireachta, áfach, ní raibh go leor eolais ná go leor cleachtadh déanta acu ar struchtúr na n-abairtí chun a bheith in ann comhrá a chur i láthair. Chun an cleachtas reatha a fheabhsú, is gá do na hoidí an teanga atá le múineadh agus le foghlaim a aithint níos soiléire in a scéimeanna gearrthréimseacha. Ba chóir dul siar ar réamheolais na ndaltaí go rialta. Léann na daltaí le líofacht agus le tuiscint mhaith. Tugtar deiseanna rialta do dhaltaí scríbhneoireacht fheidhmiúil sa Ghaeilge a chleachtadh. Tá gá ag na hoidí scileanna scríbhneoireachta na ndaltaí a fhorbairt ar bhonn díreach ionas go mbeidh na dalta ábalta scríobh go cruinn agus go neamhspleách. *While effective practice was observed in some classrooms during the evaluation, there is a need for the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Irish. The examples of good practice demonstrated that pupils' comprehension skills were well developed, good use was made of rhymes and poems in an effort to ensure that pupils' acquire a store of vocabulary, and pupils read with good fluency and understanding. Additionally, appropriate emphasis is placed on teaching the language through active teaching methodologies. The majority of teachers have praiseworthy fluency and lessons are delivered admirably through the medium of Irish. However, although opportunities were provided for the pupils to work in pairs during the evaluation, they did not have sufficient knowledge or sufficient practice of the sentence structures to enable them to engage in conversation. To improve the current practice, there is a need for teachers to identify the target vocabulary and language more clearly in their short-term planning and there is a need to regularly revise pupils' previously acquired knowledge. While regular opportunities are provided for pupils to practise functional writing, there is a need for teachers to develop pupils' writing skills in Irish in a systematic manner so as to enable pupils to write accurately and independently.*

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is good. The development of pupils' expressive language skills has been identified appropriately by teachers as a priority for improvement. Teachers need to ensure that there are clear objectives identified in their planning in order to achieve the desired progression in expressive language skills. The use of class novels and guided reading initiatives serves to encourage good levels of reading competence, and successfully fosters a positive attitude towards reading among pupils. Pupils read with good decoding and fluency skills and demonstrate a commendable understanding of what they have read. However, there is scope to develop pupils' expression in reading. While results of standardised test results for English reading indicate that pupils are attaining well according to ability level, there are examples of more-able pupils in some classes who could be challenged further. More careful attention to providing for more-able pupils within their planning will enhance the capacity of teachers to create suitably challenging learning experiences for these pupils. Many pupils achieve good standards in their written work and progression is evident in terms of the presentation of their work. Pupils are writing in an appropriate range of genres and they demonstrate a confidence and enthusiasm for engaging in independent writing tasks.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is good. Pupils' attainment levels on standardised tests of Mathematics indicate that a majority of pupils are achieving in line with their ability levels. It is notable that there are a number of more-able pupils for whom attainment levels could be higher. Some very good practices have been put in place for Mathematics which will contribute to improving attainment for these pupils. These include differentiated station teaching, a whole-school approach to problem-solving and an emphasis on strategies to promote procedural fluency. To optimise the impact of these worthwhile initiatives, teachers should ensure that these activities are underpinned by clearly identified objectives that are appropriate to the varying ability levels that are in each class. As a means of developing the very effective teaching of problem-solving strategies that were in evidence, pupils should be given more opportunities to engage in the formulating of problems and the solving of open-ended tasks. In questionnaires, a significant majority of pupils agreed that they are progressing well in Mathematics.

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in History is good. There are some worthwhile examples of history topics being integrated with other curricular areas. Creditable emphasis is placed on local studies throughout the school. Pupils display an interest in and enthusiasm for History and a good knowledge and understanding of topics taught. Effective teaching was observed which focused on stimulating pupils' interests through the judicious use of probing questions and in facilitating pupils to make explicit connections with previous learning. During the evaluation, teachers used an appropriate range of methodologies including artefacts, photographs and timelines. A review of monthly progress records suggests that there is scope to extend the use of these methodologies to progress pupils' skill development in history.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In all settings, teaching was of a good quality with some instances of very good practice including the explicit sharing of new concepts, skills and language, higher-order questions to stimulate pupil interest, and a substantial consolidation phase to reinforce learning. Such practices should characterise teaching in all settings. While many examples of active and collaborative learning methodologies were observed, there is a need for greater structure to ensure that these collaborative approaches result in good-quality learning. The greater use of quality visual resources is required to promote a broader-based learning experience. An excellent whole-school analysis of standardised test scores relevant to pupil ability levels has been prepared. There is scope, in some instances, to make better use of these records to inform planning. Greater use of assessment to inform learning and an increased emphasis on formative feedback during lessons to pupils are recommended.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement for pupils in receipt of additional support is good. There are many examples of provision being directed by specific targets which correlate with pupils' priority needs. In some instances, however, targets need to better correlate with pupils' identified needs in order to optimise learning outcomes for pupils. Teaching in all settings is affirming and characterised by positive pupil engagement. There is scope to make better use of visual resources and concrete materials to stimulate engagement and consolidate learning. A very effective example of in-class support provision was observed during the evaluation. Particularly commendable was the focused way in which provision correlated with pupil ability level. The continued development of this model of support is advised. The greater use of in-class support models will also ensure the provision of a more coherent learning experience for pupils in receipt of additional support. Special needs assistants (SNAs) work very effectively in collaboration with teachers to meet the care needs of the pupils.
- Pupils in the special classes present as interested and competent learners. A very positive, structured and affirming learning environment has been created in all special classes. The effective pacing of lessons and the insightful response of teachers to pupils' answers and questions contribute to good teaching in this context. In some instances, there is scope to further enhance the level of challenge within lessons. There is also a need to create more focused opportunities to develop independent and social learning skills in a systematic manner. To assist teachers in achieving this, it is recommended that priority needs for pupils in these areas be incorporated by teachers into their short-term planning. SNAs work very effectively under the direction of teachers to support pupils. There is scope to formalise communication between teachers and SNAs to optimise the range of insights available to inform provision for these pupils.

- The HSCL coordinator works in a positive and proactive manner to ensure that a wide range of focused supports is provided to pupils and families.