

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**St Pius X Boys' National School**  
**Terenure, Dublin 6**  
**Uimhir rolla: 19177U**

**Date of inspection: 25 February 2010**



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

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St. Pius X National School was undertaken in February 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and Music. 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.

### INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

St. Pius X Boys' National School was founded in 1965. This Catholic school is under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin and provides education to boys from junior infants to sixth class. The school shares its campus with St. Pius X Girls' National School. Enrolment numbers have been steady for the past few years, with demand for places exceeding school capacity. The attendance level of the pupils is very good.

The following table provides an overview of the enrolment and staffing in the school at the time of the evaluation:

	Number
Pupils enrolled in the school	501
Mainstream classes in the school	17
Teachers on the school staff	28
Mainstream class teachers	17
Teachers working in support roles	8
Special needs assistants	8

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

### 1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

Staff and management promote a school climate that is welcoming, happy and safe for its pupils. The stated mission of the school is the pursuit of excellence across a range of academic, cultural and artistic dimensions of the child. Commitment to realising the school's mission is clearly apparent in the leadership of the school, the work in classrooms and the dedication of teachers and parents to curricular and extracurricular programmes. The Catholic ethos of the school is actively fostered through the school's enabling of pupils to prepare for the sacraments of communion and confirmation and the daily recitation of prayers.

### 1.2 Board of management

The board of management is properly constituted and functions in a competent manner. It meets approximately eight times per year and minutes of meetings are maintained. The board ensures that Departmental regulations regarding all aspects of school life are observed. It regularly devises and reviews long-term and short-term aims for the improvement of the school. Clear roles are assigned within the board and sub committees are established where necessary to carry out specific tasks. Board members have availed of training provided by the Catholic Primary School

Management Association (CPMSA). The board is to be commended for upgrading and maintaining the school building to a high standard. It oversees the management of the school's finances effectively and has placed significant emphasis on the acquisition of resources in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The board provides funding for teachers to engage in professional development.

It takes an active role in the devising and ratification of whole-school organisational policies. Curriculum plans are devised by the staff and brought to the board for discussion and ratification. Relationships between the board, staff, parents and wider school community are excellent. The chairperson meets with the principal at least once per week and maintains regular communication with the teaching staff. The staff representative on the board also contributes effectively to board-school communications. The board promotes and affirms the work of the staff by attending activities and celebrations within the school.

### **1.3 In-school management**

The principal is an effective manager who demonstrates proficient organisational skills and ensures the school is run in a highly efficient and successful manner. He has a long association with the school and displays a strong sense of pride in the pupils' and teachers' achievements. He facilitates excellent lines of communication between the staff, parents and wider school community. The principal supports the staff in leading the development of curricular, extracurricular, organisational and pastoral dimensions of school life in an effective way.

The in-school management team comprises an administrative principal, a deputy principal, three assistant principals and seven special duties posts. They work diligently and collaboratively in discharging their duties. In fulfilling their curriculum leadership roles the team coordinate in-school planning days, lead policy development, acquire and manage resources and share good practice in their assigned subject areas. They meet regularly and provide frequent updates to the staff on the progress of their work. They encourage teachers to become involved in sub-committee work relating to school development planning, thus contributing very significantly to the ongoing professional development of the staff.

### **1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community**

The management of relationships and communications with the school community is one of the strengths of the school. The school has an active parents' association that is affiliated to the National Parents' Council. The parents' association supports the school in a significant way through fundraising and the organisation of receptions for school celebrations. It is to be commended for the co-ordination and management of a broad range of extracurricular classes for the pupils including dance, music, swimming and chess. A number of parents are involved in supporting in-class activities in the areas of reading and Visual Arts.

The school has in place a range of effective procedures to facilitate communication with parents. These include annual parent-teacher meetings, annual written reports to parents on the progress of their children and regular newsletters. The school prospectus, which all parents receive, is very attractive and communicates the main school policies and procedures clearly. A comprehensive school website is successfully used to share information with parents and to display the pupils' work and achievements across a variety of curricular areas. Strong links are established between the local football, hurling and golfing clubs as well as the St. Vincent de Paul.

## **1.5 Management of pupils**

The management of pupils is excellent. The pupils are extremely well behaved. They are very attentive in lessons and articulately engage in conversations. Through the provision of a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular programmes the school supports the pupils' social, cultural, artistic and sporting development. In-school programmes are offered to all pupils and significant emphasis is placed on fun and participation for all. The pupils successfully take part in national and local science competitions. They are regular champions in hurling, Gaelic football and Olympic handball leagues. In addition to formal competitions, inter-class tournaments in hurling, football, athletics and Olympic handball are also planned.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning**

The quality of whole-school organisational policies is good. Board members and staff members work together effectively in devising and ratifying whole-school organisational policies. These plans address procedural issues and satisfy legislative requirements under Department of Education and Science regulations. Whole-school plans for Mathematics and Music are comprehensive and show continuity and progression in content and concept development from junior infants to sixth class. While curriculum plans for Irish and English offer a broad overview of provision, further practical detail regarding content, methodologies and resources in the delivery of oral language and writing programmes in both English and Irish is required.

The quality of classroom planning is good. The teachers' long-term plans are broad and balanced and, in some classes, are informed by whole-school curriculum plans. For the most part, short-term plans are based on strands and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). There is need for all teachers to be more focussed in terms of stating the learning outcomes, resources and teaching methodologies for pupils with varying levels of ability and learning needs. Satisfactory monthly progress reports are completed by all teachers.

### **2.2 Child protection policy and procedures**

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with 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. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **3.1 Language**

#### **Gaeilge**

Ar an íomlan, tá múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge éifeachtach. Cuireann na h-oidí uile ceachtanna í láthair atá bunaithe ar théamaí an churaclam Gaeilge. Go ginearálta, baineann siad

feidhm chuí as réimse achmhainní agus modhanna múinte le haghaidh múineadh na Gaeilge. Cruthaítear timpeallachtaí tacúil i ngach seomra ranga chun cabhrú le forbairt na teanga agus chun foclóir na ndaltaí a leathnú. I gcuid is mó de na ranganna, baineann na h-oidí úsáid as Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil i rith an lae. Le linn na meastóireachta chonacthas roinnt ceachtanna ar ard-chaighdeán. Bhí múineadh foclóra agus frasaí mar chuid dilís de na ceachtanna seo. Cuireadh ar chumas na ndaltaí sna seomraí ranga sin teanga nua a chleachtadh i mbeirteanna nó i ngrúpaí agus bhí siad in ann ceisteanna a chur agus a fhreagairt go stuama i nGaeilge. Bhí múineadh scileanna léitheoireachta san áireamh sa dea-chleachtas seo, trí úsáid a bhaint as réimse leathan léitheoireachta, agus modhanna múinte éifeachtachta. I roinnt seomraí ranga, léiríodh samplaí maithe de scríobhneoireacht i ngach seánra ar na ballaí agus sna cóipleabhair. Tríd an scoil bhí na daltaí uile in ann ceisteanna bunaithe ar théamaí an churaclam Gaeilge a fhreagairt agus bhí ar a gcumas léamh le líofacht chuí agus le tuiscint. Ba chóir an dea-chleachtas a léiríodh sa scoil a leathnú agus a fhorbairt chun chumas labhartha na ndaltaí a neartú agus, go h-áirithe, chun a chur ar a gcumas ceisteanna bunaithe ar théamaí an churaclam Gaeilge a chur agus a fhreagairt.

### **Irish**

*The overall standard of teaching and learning in Irish is effective. All teachers present lessons that are based on the themes of the Irish curriculum. Overall, they make appropriate use of a range of resources and methodologies to support lesson presentation. Supportive environments are created in all classrooms to assist language development and extend the pupils' vocabulary. In most classrooms, the teachers use Irish incidentally over the course of the school day. Some exemplary lessons were observed during the evaluation. These lessons incorporated the explicit teaching of vocabulary and phrases. The pupils in these classrooms were enabled to practice new language in pairs or groups and could confidently ask as well as answer questions in Irish. This best practice also included the specific teaching of reading skills through the use of a variety of reading material and effective methodologies. In a number of classrooms some good quality samples of writing in a variety of genres were displayed and evident in copybooks. All pupils throughout the school could answer questions based on the themes of the Irish curriculum and could read with appropriate fluency and comprehension. The exemplary practice evident in the school should now be shared and developed in order to raise the pupils' ability to communicate with each other and, in particular, to enable them to ask as well as answer questions based on the themes of the Irish curriculum.*

### **English**

The standard of teaching and learning in English is generally good throughout the school with pupils reaching very good standards in reading. All classrooms provide print-rich environments in which language and reading are promoted. Libraries are well stocked and the pupils are exposed to a variety of reading material. Large-format books, class novels and selected texts are successfully used by the teachers to model the reading process and to teach a variety of comprehension skills. Early-reading skills are effectively taught. In infant and junior classes the pupils demonstrate very good word-attack skills and knowledge of phonological awareness. In middle and senior classes the pupils read fluently and with expression. In all classes the pupils can enthusiastically and confidently recite a range of poems and rhymes with expression and vibrancy. The teachers address the pupils' oral language needs through the broader English programme and across the curriculum. The pupils engage confidently in conversations and share their opinions successfully across a wide range of topics. To ensure continuity and progression in oral language learning, provision should be made for the explicit teaching of oral language through the implementation of a whole-school oral language programme.

Approaches to the teaching of writing in the school vary. The standard of the pupils' writing in terms of presentation, spelling and handwriting is good. In the infant and junior classes, the pupils

part take in an appropriate range of pre-writing activities and can confidently engage in the writing of words and simple sentences. In order to advance their independent writing skills at this level they should also be enabled to engage in the emergent writing process. In some middle and senior classes the pupils are provided with opportunities to write independently in a range of genres and some good writing samples are displayed. In other classes, the pupils write in fewer genres and writing tasks are based on text-book exercises. To extend practice in this strand, it is recommended that a whole-school approach to the teaching of writing be implemented in order to ensure that all the pupils experience the process of writing in a variety of genres.

### **3.2 Mathematics**

The overall standard of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Specific elements of competent practice include appropriate use of resources, well-structured and well-paced lessons and the consistent implementation of mathematics language throughout the school. The teachers are good communicators and explain concepts clearly. Information and communication technology (ICT) is competently utilised in lessons to teach and consolidate mathematics concepts and skills. An appropriate balance is achieved in the teaching of various strands of the curriculum. Most teachers organise purposeful number-rich environments; this should be a feature of all classrooms. In general, whole-class teaching is the predominant methodology utilised in lessons with some provision for group work. Differentiation in Mathematics is provided primarily through participation in an effective enrichment programme for high achievers, learning-support teaching for less able pupils and individual pupil support while the whole class are on task. For the most part, pupil attainment in Mathematics is high, with a number of pupils demonstrating excellent ability in the subject. In general, pupils at all class levels have competent knowledge of number, measures, shape and space, and data. They demonstrate proficient estimation skills in senior classes. The pupils' copybooks are well laid out and monitored consistently. Some pupils in a small number of classes have difficulty in performing number operations and problem solving. High achieving pupils or pupils who perform at above average ability are not significantly challenged in some classes. In order to cater for pupils at different levels of ability in Mathematics, it is recommended that the grouping of pupils for lessons be considered, with the use of in-class support where possible.

### **3.3 Music**

Music is taught to a high standard in this school. The pupils perform excellently in song singing. Their sense of pitch and rhythm is successfully developed through the consistent implementation of a whole-school music-literacy programme, supportive music environments and skilfully-delivered music lessons. Very good use is made of interactive whiteboards, software and digital media in the teaching of Music. The pupils in all classes can confidently sing a wide repertoire of songs including rounds, partner songs and part songs. In addition to in-class song singing, all pupils are encouraged to take part in the school choir. The choir is proud of its regular success in local and national competitions. Learning in this area significantly contributes to whole school events, musicals, concerts and religious ceremonies.

Very good practice is evident in the area of exploring sounds and composing in some classes. The pupils are enabled to explore sounds and compose simple rhythmic patterns using instruments, body percussion and vocal sounds. A comprehensive whole-school programme for listening and responding has been developed and is successfully delivered in some classes. The teachers' individual musical talents and expertise are used effectively in the delivery of a comprehensive music programme.

### **3.4 Assessment**

Formal assessment practices involve the annual administration of standardised tests in English and Mathematics to pupils from first class to sixth class. The Middle Infant Screen Test (MIST) is administered to pupils in senior infants. The principal and special education needs coordinator meet to review these results. As part of this review the pupils in need of learning support or supplementary teaching are identified. Some very good assessment practices have been established in special education needs (SEN) settings. These practices involve the frequent administration of formative assessments and the systematic recording of the pupils' progress in English and Mathematics. There is variation in the quality of assessment practices and in the use of these results to inform future programmes of work in mainstream classes. Assessment modes in some classes include teacher-designed and commercial tests in Mathematics, and records of spelling and tables' tests. Pupils' written work is regularly monitored, with some useful formative feedback being provided in a small number of classrooms. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to assessment be implemented and pupils' progress be systematically recorded. In addition, the outcomes of assessment should be utilised to inform programmes of learning for pupils at different levels of ability.

## **4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS**

### **4.1 Pupils with special educational needs**

There is very good support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). The SEN team comprises eight full time learning support/resource teachers. Eight special needs assistants (SNAs) are employed; they carry out their duties diligently. Support for pupils is provided in the areas of literacy, numeracy and low and high incidence learning needs. The SEN team approach their work with competence and professionalism. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and individual and group learning programmes set out clear and attainable learning targets. In some cases, these targets are reviewed at the end of the instructional term; this practice should be applied in all settings. The standard of teaching observed in SEN classes is of a very good standard. Well-structured and well-paced lessons incorporate a good range of active-learning methodologies and resources. The teachers' use of role play and drama to teach life skills to pupils with low incidence learning needs is to be commended. The pupils are making very good progress in these settings and clearly enjoy and engage successfully in the learning activities provided. SEN classrooms are bright and spacious. Some excellent environments are organised incorporating a wide range of resources, displays and interactive play areas. There is need for all SEN classrooms to create purposeful environments to support the pupils' learning. Very good communication is evident within the SEN team and between the team and the principal, class teachers and parents. SEN teaching primarily comprises withdrawal in both individual and group settings with some provision for in-class support. Consideration should now be given to extending the provision for in-class support and team teaching to target specific groups of pupils.

### **4.2 Other supports for pupils: disadvantaged, minority and other groups**

The board and staff ensure that all pupils are enabled to engage in all curricular activities through the use of school funds and departmental grants. A number of extracurricular activities are offered to all pupils free of charge namely, choir, Olympic handball and GAA games. The principal and senior members of staff have a very good understanding of the local area and of the community the school serves. They have built up a professional knowledge of all the pupils' backgrounds and needs. A small number of pupils from a variety of different nationalities are enrolled in St. Pius X

B.N.S. They are successfully integrated into the life of the school. An intercultural policy has recently been drafted but has yet to be ratified by the board of management. There are currently no pupils from the travelling community or other minority groups enrolled in the school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- The school succeeds in promoting the holistic development of all the pupils through the provision of a wide range of effective curricular and extracurricular programmes.
- The principal is an effective manager; his proficient organisational skills ensure that the school is run in a highly efficient and successful manner.
- The board of management functions competently.
- The standard of attainment in English reading and Mathematics is very good.
- Music is taught to a high standard in this school.
- There is very good support for pupils with special educational needs.
- The management of relationships and communications with the school community is excellent.
- The parents support the work of the school in a significant way.
- The management of pupils is exemplary.

The following key recommendations are made in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school:

- It is recommended that a whole-school approach to the teaching of writing be implemented in order to ensure that all the pupils experience the writing process in a variety of genres.
- The grouping of pupils in the teaching of Mathematics should be considered in order to ensure that all pupils are sufficiently challenged in lessons.
- A whole-school approach to assessment is recommended. The outcomes of formal and informal assessments should be utilised to meet the learning needs of pupils of varying abilities.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and the board of management where the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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# **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 wish to acknowledge the professionalism and courtesy of the Inspectorate during their visit to St Pius X BNS. The Board welcomes the very positive finding of the WSE process and would like to strongly endorse the strengths that were recognised by the report. The Board appreciates the recognition of the proficient manner in which the school is run by the principal and the commitment and hard work of the dedicated teaching, care and ancillary staff. The whole evaluation process was very positive and affirmative experience for St Pius X BNS and the wider school community.

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

All of the recommendations in the report are being addressed.