

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

**Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire BNS,
Rathfarnham Dublin 14
Uimhir rolla: 19446V**

Date of inspection: 2 October 2014



Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Report

Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE - MLL) was undertaken in St Mary's BNS in September 2014. This report is based on a selection of lessons observed in a range of learning settings in the school, interaction with pupils and review of their work, meetings with the principal, board and parent representatives, the middle management team and special needs assistants, completed parent and pupil questionnaires, and a selection of school documents. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

St. Mary's BNS is an all-boys vertical national school situated in south Dublin. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The attendance levels of the 472 pupils enrolled are excellent. The school has 17 mainstream class teachers, 16 of whom are deployed in mainstream classes, with six full-time and one part-time support teacher.

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- This is a welcoming, inclusive school.
- The quality of teaching is high with some examples of excellent practice.
- Pupil learning achievements overall are very good.
- Relationships among teachers and children are mutually respectful.
- Information and Communication technology (ICT) is used effectively as a teaching and learning tool throughout the school.
- The principal has a committed focus on improving learning for pupils.
- The board of management carries out its duties diligently and conscientiously and is very supportive of the school.
- The parents' association is actively involved in school life.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- To maximise the learning opportunities for pupils, more open-ended, discovery and play based methodologies should be used so that inquiry and problem-solving skills are fostered at all levels in the school.
- The board of management should ensure the deployment of the seventeenth mainstream class teacher to a mainstream class in line with circulars 13/2013 and 007/2014.
- Strategies and structures should be further developed to facilitate greater engagement and participation by the principal and staff members at a whole-school level. Such meaningful consultation together with active listening would help to build leadership capacity among the staff and enable the development of a collaborative team approach to school improvement.

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Pupil learning achievements overall are very good and pupils experience a commendable range of learning experiences. Children with special education needs are given effective support and positive learning outcomes are being achieved. Tá caighdeán ard á bhaint amach ag na daltaí sa Ghaeilge labhartha agus tá an dearcadh dearfach atá acu le moladh. Overall very good learning outcomes are being achieved in Mathematics, in early literacy skills and in English reading. In lessons observed, pupils were provided with a very good

music experience based on musical concepts and achievement in aspects of performance are highly commended. Pupils also show good achievement levels in the Visual Arts, and ICT is used successfully to support individual learning in reading.

- To further enhance the quality of learning in the school, it is recommended that all curriculum initiatives be based directly on the learning needs and abilities of the pupils, have clear, specific targets and objectives and be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. It is also recommended that the staged approach to providing support for individual pupils be implemented in a more focused manner through the school.

2. Quality of teaching

- The quality of teaching in both mainstream and support settings is high with some excellent practice in evidence. Planning and preparation for teaching at both individual and whole-school level is very good. Lessons are generally well structured and focused. A good range of methodologies is in use and overall the quality of teacher questioning and pupil responses is high. In particular classes, there is an excellent approach to the mastery of basic concepts and skills. Project work, drama and ICT are used effectively to engage pupils in their learning. In the questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation, parents expressed their agreement that the teaching is good in the school and almost all pupils acknowledge that teachers explain things clearly.

Tá béim chuí curtha ag na hoidí ar na gnéithe éagsúla den chlár sa Ghaeilge agus ar an iomlán úsáidtear an Ghaeilge mar theanga teagaisc. The Physical Education lessons observed were skill based as were the Social, Environmental and Scientific and Social, Personal and Health Education lessons. The introduction of a collaborative teaching approach in the junior section of the school is a positive development, whereby pupils are benefitting from the open-ended exploration and discovery learning approaches being used.

- Pupils display very good levels of ability and interest in learning. It is recommended that teachers develop pupils' higher-order and problem-solving skills and ensure that they are challenging pupils appropriately, at all class levels. To this end, additional open-ended, play, discovery and inquiry-based teaching approaches are required. It is also recommended that the very good whole-class teaching in use could be effectively adapted at particular times to provide more targeted small group teaching. The introduction of the *Aistear Curriculum Framework* in the infant classes would support more child-directed active learning and the implementation of many aspects of the curriculum at this level.
- A very good whole-school policy on assessment has been developed and some very good assessment practices are in use. The use of a particular ICT programme to enable monitoring of progress in Mathematics is proving beneficial. To build on the good approaches in place, teachers should continue to explore and develop appropriate assessment for each level. The assessment information collated could be used more systematically to inform teaching, both for class groups and for individual pupils, and in particular to meet the needs of the more able pupils. Facilitating meaningful feedback for pupils will also enhance their ability to self-reflect and become more active agents in their own learning journey.

3. Support for pupils' well-being

- The quality of care and well-being for individual pupils is very good and a warm respectful atmosphere is created in both mainstream and support settings. Teachers provide very positive learning environments and pupils are eager and motivated in their learning. A very good range of after-school and sports activities is available for the pupils and participation in these by the pupils is very high. Classroom routines are well organised and a consistent and effective behaviour programme is in place.

Pupil questionnaire returns indicated that a significant number of pupils didn't know if the pupils in their own classes behaved well. In this context, further clarity regarding expectations in relation to pupil behaviour may be necessary. A student council was established a number of years ago and this should be further exploited to extend pupil voice. Similarly, structured opportunities should be created to engage in consultation with pupils about matters that are relevant to them including the school self- evaluation process.

- 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*.

4. Leadership and Management

- Among the key priorities of the principal are creating and maintaining a welcoming, inclusive school for pupils and good home-school interactions. Positive achievements are evident in these areas. Almost all parents expressed the view, through the parent questionnaire, that there is a good atmosphere in the school, that it is welcoming and that it is well run. The principal is aware of his role as an instructional leader and he has promoted particular curricular aspects in order to improve learning outcomes.
- The deputy principal is very supportive of the principal and he and the other post-holders carry out their individual duties capably and competently. School planning activities have been undertaken by the deputy principal and the in-school management team and some high quality whole-school plans, including class plans for each level, have been collated. Similarly, some individual members of staff have taken the lead in either policy development or in putting a new curricular initiative in place, such as the online reading approach.
- The commitment of the board, principal and staff to working hard for the good of the school is very evident. However, the creation of a more positive, open and consultative climate would facilitate greater engagement and participation by staff members, would build leadership capacity among them and help develop a more collaborative team approach to school improvement. This will require active listening by the principal and meaningful consultation and communication with all members of staff with less recourse to outside experts. The impact of such an approach will ultimately be to maximise the learning opportunities for the pupils and would also build trust, open communication and a positive working environment.
- Both the school and the parents' association have a number of processes in place to support home-school links and according to the parents these work well. There is very good information regarding the school available to parents and over the years some opportunities have been provided for them to engage directly in policy formation. To ensure that the widest range of views and perspectives of parents are included in school decisions, more structured opportunities to consult and engage with the wider parent body should be facilitated.
- The board of management carries out its duties diligently and conscientiously and is very supportive of the work of the school. The school building and its environs have been very well maintained and resourced. Very good communication exists between the board and the parents' association. In line with the earlier conclusion relating to a collaborative team approach, an immediate priority which should be progressed by the board, is the further development of a positive, open and consultative climate within the school. The board should ensure that effective processes are in place to effect change at all school levels.

It is also recommended that the board ensure the deployment of the seventeenth mainstream class teacher to a mainstream class so as to effect an improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio and comply with circulars 13/2013 and 007/2014.

5. School Self-evaluation

- To date the school has drafted an action plan for improving the teaching and learning in Mathematics. The consistent implementation of the actions through the school is commended and it is evident that these are having a positive impact on pupil achievement. Similarly, an agreed approach to the teaching of Irish phrases has impacted positively on learning outcomes in oral Irish. A plan for improving literacy is in its early stages.
- It is advised that the school continues to engage proactively with the school self-evaluation process ensuring that a range of evidence is gathered and that subsequent targets and actions are based on the findings from the evidence. How learning targets and actions are monitored and reviewed at a whole-school level will be key to the effectiveness of the actions that are put in place.

Conclusion

- There is very good capacity in the school to engage in further development. The teaching staff possess the skills and expertise to drive school improvement and to effect change in the school. However, progress is contingent on a whole-school team approach to school self-evaluation being developed that is based on a shared sense of purpose and agreed, consultative processes.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes the publication of the WSE MLL report and is pleased that the Inspectorate recognises the many strengths of the school in particular its inclusivity and high quality teaching. The Board are pleased that the hard work of the teaching staff is recognised. The Board would like to publicly acknowledge the support provided by S.N.A's and non-academic staff. The Board regrets that there was no reference to the Catholic ethos of St Marys or the immense amount of work being undertaken in the area of writing skills.

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 Board has applied for planning permission and grant funding for a new classroom to ensure the deployment of the 17th teacher in Mainstream in line with DOES guidelines. The Board has taken the advice of the Inspectorate in regard to Leadership and Consultation and has commenced the processes and provision of structures to implement change in this area.