

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

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

**Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille**  
**Mountain Park, Tallaght, Dublin 24**  
**Uimhir rolla: 19464A**

**Date of inspection: 16 September 2013**



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

## 1. Introduction

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille is a small, mixed, Catholic primary school situated on the campus of St. Dominic's NS in Tallaght, Dublin 24. An important context factor is that the majority of the forty pupils on rolls do not have English as their first language and many are from the Traveller and Roma community. Pupils are taught in two multi-grade classes. The school receives additional grants through its participation in DEIS Band 1 (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). The school implements a range of strategies to improve and affirm the pupils' attendance levels. In view of the fact that a significant minority of pupils miss more than twenty days, the board should review the effectiveness of the school's attendance-promotion strategies. 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.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

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

- The school fosters inclusiveness and successfully promotes the pupils' sense of belonging.
- The teachers develop the pupils' cooperative skills effectively.
- There are good quality supports to meet the care and welfare needs of all pupils.
- There is skilful use of play-based learning activities in the teaching of infants.
- The pupils are very well behaved, mannerly and cooperative.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board should closely monitor standards and oversee the setting, implementation and review of targets for school improvement.
- Strategic leadership is required in relation to planning, teaching and assessment to improve learning outcomes for pupils.
- Whole-school curriculum plans should reflect the specific context of the pupils and comprehensively guide all aspects of practice.
- Teachers should ensure that their short-term planning clarifies the specific learning objectives for all class levels.
- Regular formal staff meetings should be reinstated and other structures put in place to enable teachers to plan together, review practice and embed effective whole-school teaching approaches.
- It is recommended that a whole-school plan for oral language be put in place and the teaching of subject-specific language be prioritised across all curriculum areas.

### 3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management, which meets regularly, carries out its work in relation to policy review and school matters with commitment and in a spirit of cooperation. At present there are significant challenges regarding the pupils' achievement levels in English and Mathematics. In this regard the board should, as a priority, closely monitor standards of the pupils' achievement levels and oversee the setting, implementation and evaluation of school improvement targets in the DEIS plan.
- The teaching principal, who has a long association with the school, fosters good working relations, promotes a sense of belonging among pupils and enables their participation in a variety of cultural, social and sporting events. Going forward, strategic leadership is now required in whole-school planning, teaching and assessment to improve learning outcomes for pupils. To this end, it is recommended that school management and staff members devise whole-school processes and systems for curriculum planning and pupil assessment. These systems and processes should enable the teachers to work collaboratively in the planning of learning programmes, and in the monitoring and review of teaching and learning outcomes.
- School facilities are generally appropriate. A range of suitable resources, including information and communications technology (ICT), is available. Some attractive displays which support and consolidate current learning are prepared. However there is scope to extend these displays as well as the range of resources being used for language teaching. Pupils and staff assemble daily for breakfast, morning break and hot lunches in the canteen/general purposes room. A system to regularise break times is advised.
- In general, appropriate channels of communication, both formal and informal, are maintained with the school community through newsletters, meetings, school reports and 'text-a-parent'. In the Inspectorate survey, most parents agreed that the school was welcoming, it had a good atmosphere and they were happy with it. Their responses also reflected the need for greater communication, particularly regarding the relationships and sexuality programme, the work of the board, and procedures relating to bullying. While some parents of younger pupils participate in classroom-based activities, there is scope to extend the ways in which parents in general can be encouraged to engage in the life of the school.
- Overall, there is positive management of pupils and warm, supportive relations are evident. Staff members display a firm commitment to the pupils' holistic development. Non-teaching staff work in a friendly and supportive manner. The pupils are very well behaved, mannerly and cooperative. In the pupils' questionnaire responses all pupils agreed that they feel safe in class and the majority agreed that it is a good school. The pupils' responses regarding opportunities to talk about issues and to have a say in school matters should be explored further.

#### 4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The whole-school planning process requires significant change and development. While organisational policies provide satisfactory guidance on school matters, the curriculum plans do not reflect the specific school context. It is recommended that the staff, in consultation with the board, undertake a collaborative, systematic review of each curriculum plan over time. Every plan should take account of the pupils' language needs, outline balanced programmes of learning and set out clear benchmarks for each class level. Regular, formal staff meetings should be reinstated as a priority to enable the teachers to plan, share good practice and embed effective whole-school teaching approaches.
- The quality of individual teacher planning varies considerably. Where practice was appropriate, comprehensive, differentiated, long-term programmes were prepared. It is recommended that all planning be informed by pupil-assessment data. Short-term plans should be set out in clear objectives for the relevant class groupings, following the strands of the Primary School Curriculum. Monthly progress records must be maintained as required by Rule 126, *Rules for National Schools*.
- There is need to review the school's DEIS plan, particularly in relation to refining targets, clarifying how they will be achieved year-on-year, and specifying the criteria by which they will be evaluated. Enhanced monitoring and evaluation of the progress of priorities are advised.
- 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

- There is scope for development in teaching and learning. Where practice was competent there was vibrant teaching, use of stimulating resources, differentiated activities and enthusiastic engagement by pupils. There is very effective play-based learning underway in the infant classes, informed by *Aistear* - the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Where practice was less effective, a narrow range of methodologies was used and lessons were not sufficiently informed by clear learning objectives. It is recommended that all teachers place increased focus on the explicit teaching of language, and that planning for teaching and learning be focused on the key concepts and skills to be developed within each topic. Ongoing revision and consolidation should become a strong feature of practice. The pupils' cooperative learning skills are developed effectively in all classes.
- Appropriate assessment records in aspects of English and Mathematics are maintained in some classes. Screening and standardised testing are conducted annually. A whole-school approach to the maintenance of records of individual pupil attainment should be developed further. More diagnostic assessment should be carried out to determine the learning needs of pupils who are under-achieving in English and Mathematics. There is need for consistency regarding the monitoring and correction of the pupils' written work, and the provision of constructive feedback for improvement.
- Baineann an-éagsúlacht i múineadh agus i bhfoghlaím na Gaeilge. Ar an iomlán tá gnéithe le forbairt cé go bhfuil dea-chleachtas le sonrú. Chonacthas cleachtas

éifeachtach ina raibh straitéisí cumarsáide in úsáid go torthúil, obair beirte, ról-ghlacadh agus rainn ina measc. Sna meán agus na hardranganna, níl dóthain béime curtha ar an modh cumarsáide agus ní féidir le cuid is mó de na daltaí ceisteanna bunúsacha a chur agus a fhreagairt. Moltar rannpháirtíocht agus caighdeán labhairt na ndaltaí a fheabhsú trí thascanna comhoibrítheacha agus gníomhaíochtaí drámaíochta a eagrú. Ní mór cláir chéimnithe don léitheoireacht agus don scríbhneoireacht a dhearadh chun taitneamh agus dúshlán oiriúnach a thabhairt do na daltaí ina gcuid foghlama.

*There is considerable variation in the teaching and learning of Irish. Overall there is scope for development although good practice is evident. Effective practice was observed where paired activities, role play and poems were skilfully used as communication strategies. In the middle and senior classes, there is insufficient emphasis on the communicative approach and many pupils are not able to pose and answer simple questions. It is recommended that the pupils' participation levels and standards of speaking be improved through the use of cooperative tasks and drama techniques. Progressive programmes for reading and writing are required, which provide an appropriate level of challenge and enjoyment to pupils.*

- Overall, there is scope for development in English. There is competent teaching of phonics and early-reading skills. All pupils have regular opportunities to read independently using a variety of graded-reading material. While some pupils read with confidence and understanding, many pupils are experiencing difficulties. It is recommended that the teachers engage in structured reading sessions and place more emphasis on the teaching of new vocabulary, comprehension skills and word-attack skills.
- Good work is underway in the recitation and exploration of poetry. The pupils engage in a range of writing activities, including the Write-a-Book initiative. There is significant scope to enhance provision for oral language teaching. Levels of the pupils' participation vary greatly during lessons and discussions. A whole-school, oral-language programme should be devised which focuses on enabling the pupils to communicate in a confident and competent manner.
- Teaching and learning in Mathematics have scope for development. Aspects of good practice observed incorporated differentiated lesson content, and the preparation of appropriate resources and learning activities. A review of school data, the pupils' work and inspector-tasks shows that many pupils, particularly in the senior classes, are experiencing difficulty regarding their knowledge of number facts and their ability to solve practical problems. It is recommended that teachers ensure that all lessons include highly-participative oral work which focuses on the teaching of the relevant mathematics vocabulary. There is need for more direct teaching of problem-solving strategies using real-life examples, with less emphasis on independent workbook tasks.
- The quality of teaching and learning in History is fair. Some effective use of story and practical, hands-on activities was observed and throughout the school, teachers place a suitable emphasis on developing the pupils' research skills through the use of ICT and some project work. Overall there is scope for more in-depth study of local history, the consolidation and revision of prior learning and the use of a wider variety of methodologies. It is recommended that a spiral approach, as outlined in the History Curriculum be implemented, revisiting topics in increasing detail.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The special education needs team comprises two newly-appointed teachers who are shared with other schools. Appropriate initial work is underway in aspects of the assessment, profiling and early-planning for targeted pupils. It is recommended that the team meet with staff on a formal basis to plan whole-school provision. This is to ensure cohesion and best practice in all aspects of support, particularly in diagnosing learning needs, target setting, planning and assessment. Opportunities for training and observing best practice should be prioritised for new teachers.
- There are good quality supports to meet the care and welfare needs of all pupils. The school fosters inclusiveness and successfully promotes the pupils' sense of belonging. A variety of strategies are implemented successfully to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. These include the provision of school meals, the book-rental scheme and sports coaching. Good promotion of home-school partnership is evident through the combined work of staff members and the coordinator of home-school-community liaison.