

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Kevin's Junior National School
Donaghmede, County Dublin
Uimhir rolla: 19538D**

Date of inspection: 10 February 2010



WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Kevin's Junior 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 Visual Arts. 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 Kevin's Junior National School is a co-educational school catering for pupils from junior infants to second class. The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and serves the area of Donaghmede.

The school building, which dates from 1976, provides pupils with a clean, safe and attractive learning environment. There are a number of rooms not required as classrooms. Three of the otherwise vacant rooms have been developed by the school as a music-resource room, a computer room and a school library. The school playground has recently been re-surfaced, new windows installed, the roof refurbished and the school hall re-decorated. Plans are in place to develop a school garden and to re-paint the exterior of the school building.

Pupil attendance figures indicate that there is a significant number of pupils who have a high rate of absenteeism. The board is strongly advised to develop a pupil attendance strategy to address this issue.

The findings of this inspection suggest that a good quality education is being provided for the pupils of this school with some scope to better meet varying pupil ability levels, particularly in Mathematics. The deployment of support staff to provide more in-class support would assist the school in addressing this issue.

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	111
Mainstream classes in the school	4
Teachers on the school staff	7
Mainstream class teachers	4
Teachers working in support roles	3
Teachers working in support roles not based in this school	3
Special needs assistants	2

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, vision or mission

St Kevin's National School seeks to 'provide a happy, caring and stimulating environment promoting self-esteem and confidence' believing that 'all children are entitled to develop to their

fullest potential-academically, socially, emotionally, physically, morally, spiritually and aesthetically.’ Clearly structured lessons delivered in a positive manner, an ordered learning environment and the provision of additional learning experiences such as ‘*Science Week*’, an annual school concert, school trips and visits by outside speakers demonstrate that the school is successful in bringing this mission statement to life.

1.2 The board of management

The board is correctly constituted. It meets regularly and performs its functions conscientiously and in accordance with the Education Act 1988. A strong spirit of collegiality and a sense of shared purpose permeate the work of this board. The board has been very effective in overseeing the development and the maintenance of the school building. As a response to declining numbers in 1996, the board of management decided to rent half of the school premises to a community-based adult education provider. Part of the school is also rented to a pre-school. These arrangements provide funding for the school and are effective in making productive use of the school building.

Given the size of the school building relative to the pupil population of the school and the close proximity of a larger junior school, the issue of amalgamation was raised with the board during this inspection. The board feels that a school of four mainstream classes will continue to remain viable for the foreseeable future. Should these circumstances change, it is recommended that the board reconsiders the possibility of amalgamation at that stage.

There is scope for the board to play a greater role in the development of teaching and learning within the school. To this end, it is suggested that general trends in attainment levels be discussed at board meetings and that discussion about curriculum planning be directed towards improving these attainment levels.

1.3 In-school management,

The in-school management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The in-school management team carries out its duties conscientiously in a spirit of partnership. The principal is very committed to the development of the school. She is effective in creating a collaborative working environment between all members of staff. Duties have been identified for both the deputy principal and the special duties teacher. However, these duties date from 1998 and 1999. Therefore, they should be updated and regularly reviewed to encompass a broader range of activities and to ensure that they remain more closely linked to the development of teaching and learning within the school.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

There is a very active parents’ association in the school. Its members organise a number of events which are successful in cultivating a strong sense of community within the school. These activities include the annual communion breakfast, book-fairs and assisting in the school sports day. Recently the parents’ association co-ordinated the introduction of a new school uniform and re-furbished and re-decorated the school hall and kitchen.

Meetings of the parents’ association are organised regularly and all parents are invited to attend. Minutes are kept of these meetings and a copy given to the school principal and the board of management. This is effective in promoting the development of good channels of communication within the school community. A newsletter issues each term to parents documenting activities undertaken by the parents’ association to support the school. This is helpful in keeping the general parent body informed about school life.

School policies are disseminated to parents by means of a school booklet at the time of pupil registration. To ensure that parents continue to remain familiar with these guidelines, parents are sent reminders regarding school policies at the beginning of each year. Parents have participated in committees to develop areas such as relationship and sexuality education (RSE,) the code of behaviour and the anti-bullying policy. The parents' association appreciates the opportunity to make this contribution and is interested in participating further in policy development.

Because the school sees parents and parental expectations as integral to pupils succeeding in school, parents are provided with the opportunity to contribute to the educational development of pupils through helping with pre-reading and early reading activities in the infant classrooms. As with the development of school policies, parents are appreciative of this opportunity and would like to contribute further to education development in the classroom.

Representatives from the parents' association report the satisfaction of the general parent body with the quality of education provided by the school, the commitment of the school principal and the efforts of teachers to make learning interesting for pupils. They would like to see the '*text a parent*' service being introduced as an aid to communication between the home and school.

It is suggested that the school considers the dissemination of school reports at a date earlier than the last week of June to facilitate parents who may wish to discuss the content of these reports with their child's teacher. The representatives of the parents' association also believe that a meeting at the beginning of the year between all class teachers and parents would be useful in terms of informing parents about the curriculum and the standards that pupils are required to achieve at each class level.

1.5 Management of pupils

There is a warm and mutually respectful relationship between teachers and pupils. Pupil behaviour is managed very effectively with the emphasis placed on praise and encouragement. Appropriate school routines contribute to the creation of a well ordered learning environment.

2.QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1.Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is satisfactory. Key organisational policies required by legislation such as an enrolment policy and a code of behaviour have been drawn up and ratified by the board. In general, the detail supplied in organisational policies is sufficiently specific to impact positively on school life.

The board should be aware that it is not permissible in an enrolment policy to defer enrolment of a child, pending the provision of an assessment report and/or the provision of appropriate resources by the Department to meet the child's needs. The policy should be amended accordingly.

The code of behaviour requires amendment to include references to the procedures for suspending and expelling pupils. The board is advised to consult the guidelines published by the National Educational Welfare Board *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (May 2008)* in this regard.

Curriculum plans are laid out clearly. However, these plans are too general. To enhance their impact on pupils' learning, it is suggested that the requirements for each class be more

specifically delineated. These requirements should address the standards to be achieved at each class level and indicate how teaching methodologies and approaches are developed across the class levels.

The school needs to develop a system for the review and updating of curriculum plans. It is suggested that a process of action-planning be undertaken to assist with the identification of priorities and the development and implementation of new practices. This process should include consultation with parents, as appropriate. Standards of pupil attainment should form the basis for this action- planning. All policies need to be dated and signed to indicate that they have been ratified by the board.

All teachers provide short and long-term planning as required under the Rules for National Schools. In most instances, short-term planning is sufficiently specific to indicate that satisfactory thought is being given to learning objectives. However, there is scope for this to be developed, particularly in terms of provision for English. In both Mathematics and English, insufficient detail is provided with regard to how specific provision is made for addressing different ability levels, particularly those of more able pupils.

Monthly progress records are maintained appropriately. Teachers complete the monthly progress record by annotating their short-term plans to indicate what has been taught. In some instances the level of detail supplied by teachers is not sufficient to identify the content covered in a particular month. Provision should also be made to record any unintended activities and learning outcomes. It is suggested that the variation in the amount of detail provided in these monthly progress records be discussed by teachers in order to determine the optimum level of detail that should be included in these reports.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

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.QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Language

Gaeilge

Tá caighdeán sásúil ag basint le teagasc agus foghlaim na Gaeilge Sa phlean scoile cláraítear eiseamláirí teanga a bheadh oiriúnach do gach rang leibhéal mar bhunús don Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil a chothú sa scoil. Múintear na heiseamláirí seo go cuí agus baintear úsáid mhaith astu i saol coitianta na scoile Léiríonn na daltaí tuiscint bhreá orthu agus tá roinnt mhaith de na daltaí in ann úsáid a bhaint astu iad féin. Baineann na daltaí taitneamh as an nGaeilge a fhoghlaim.

Sna ceachtanna, cuirtear raon deas acmhainní oiriúnacha ar fáil agus baintear feidhm mhaith as na háiseanna seo chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt agus a chothú. Baintear úsáid éifeachtach as straitéisí difriúla chun an teanga a mhúineadh agus a fhoghlaim ar nós cluichí teanga, ról imirt,

pupéidí, amhránaíocht, Drámaíocht agus scéalaíocht. Tá stór breá rann agus amhrán ar eolas ag na daltaí i ranganna na naíonán agus aithrisíonn siad iad go taitneamhach.

San iomlán, is breá an tslí ina stiúrtar ceachtanna Gaeilge trí Ghaeilge amháin. Moltar an t-aistriúchan a sheachaint i ranganna áirithe. Moltar go mbeadh níos mó Gaeilge leanúnach le cloisteáil ag tús ceachtanna chun a chur le cumas na ndaltaí scileanna éisteachta a fhorbairt agus aithris a dhéanamh ar rithim agus ar fhuaimneanna na teanga. Cé go bhfuil foclóir, briathra agus abairtí cuí múinte ag na hoidí agus cé go bhfuil struchtúr cinnte ag gabháil leis na ceachtanna, níl go leor cumais ag na daltaí úsáid a bhaint as an bhfoclóir nó as na habairtí seo i gcomhthéacsanna difriúla. Moltar, mar sin, do na hoidí níos mó béime a chur ar dhul siar go rialta agus go teagmhasach ar an ábhar atá clúdaithe ag na daltaí chun seans a thabhairt dóibh an teanga seo a dhaingniú, ceangal a dhéanamh idir í agus ábhar nua agus úsáid a bhaint aisti i suímh éagsula.

Tá scileanna na réamh léitheoireachta agus scríbeorachta á bhforbairt go sásúil le lipéidí, luaschartaí agus abairtí simplí a léamh agus a scríobh.

Irish

The quality of teaching and learning in Irish is satisfactory. The school plan outlines language expressions appropriate to each class level as the basis for the development of informal Irish in the school. These phrases are appropriately taught and good use is made of these in the daily life of the school. Pupils demonstrate good understanding of these phrases while a good number of pupils are able to use these phrases themselves. Pupils enjoy learning Irish.

During lessons a nice range of appropriate resources is made available and these resources are used effectively to arouse and maintain pupils' interest in the lessons. Effective use is made of different strategies for the teaching and learning of the language. They include language games, role play, puppets, song-singing, Drama and story-telling. Pupils are able to recite a wide range of rhymes with enthusiasm in the infant classes

In general, lessons in Irish are conducted through the medium of Irish. The use of translation as a methodology in some classes is not advised. It is recommended that more continuous Irish be used in order to develop pupils' listening skills and to become familiar with the rhythm and sounds of the language. While an appropriately broad range of vocabulary including verbs and phrases has been taught by teachers and while these lessons are appropriately structured, pupils do not demonstrate sufficient capacity to apply their learning in different contexts. It is recommended therefore, teachers place a greater emphasis on regular and incidental revision in order to consolidate learning, to make a link between new and previous learning and to have the opportunity to apply their learning in a variety of contexts.

Pre-reading and writing skills are being developed satisfactorily through the use of labels, flash cards and the reading and writing of simple sentences.

English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. Whole-class discussion, group-work, pair-work and 'circle-time' are all used successfully to provide for focused oral language development. Teacher questioning of pupils during oral language lessons is very effective. A commendable variety of sources for oral language lessons is utilised. The identification by some teachers of specific vocabulary to be taught in other curriculum areas also enhances the teaching and learning of oral language. Poetry and rhyme figure prominently in teacher provision. Pupils are encouraged to commit poetry and rhyme to memory, thereby enriching their range of

vocabulary and sentence structure. It is recommended that teachers incorporate the Drumcondra English Profiles into this provision in order to ensure coherency in oral language skill development and to optimise learning outcomes for pupils.

Pupils are making satisfactory progress in reading. A variety of resources is utilised effectively to teach reading. These include a reading scheme through which pupils' progress at an individual rate, large-format books, class novels and library books. A stimulating print-rich environment has been created in each classroom and within the school generally. Particularly effective in this regard are the display of pupils' written work and the effective captioning of these displays.

A specific role has been identified for parents to support their children's progress in reading through the CAPER initiative (Children And Parents Reading Together). To enhance pupils' progress in reading, teachers need to complement the use of an individualised reading scheme by ensuring that sufficient emphasis is placed on the teaching of specific reading skills.

There is a clearly identified approach to the development of pupils' phonological awareness skills. Encouraging pupils to begin the process of blending letter sounds from the infant classes is very commendable practice. In some instances, teachers need to ensure that the more able pupils are challenged more during these lessons. Incorporating sentence dictation into the weekly spelling test is effective in assisting pupils to apply their learning. To enhance pupils' abilities to apply their knowledge of spelling conventions in their independent writing, it is suggested that teachers develop their approach to the use of personal dictionaries. More specific delineation of the process of drafting and editing writing between first and second class would enhance pupils' mastery of these skills. There is scope for teachers to develop writing from a cross-curricular perspective. To optimise the learning potential of such activities and to ensure coherency and progression in pupils learning, these activities should be informed by the writing indicators of the Drumcondra English profiles which describe, in a progressive way, the expected skills which pupils should be able to demonstrate in their independent writing at each class level. There is a systematic programme in place to develop pupils' skills in grammar and to develop pupils' handwriting skills. However, the presentation of some pupils' written work and standard of handwriting requires development.

A number of pupils for whom English is not their first language are in receipt of additional teaching support. This additional support is of very good quality. 'The Primary School Assessment Kit, issued by the Department, is used effectively to provide an initial assessment of these pupils' language abilities and as a means of monitoring pupils' progress. A stimulating print-rich environment has been created in the support learning setting for these pupils. Interesting, well-paced lessons make good use of active learning methods. Topics for lessons include the locality, the school and aspects of pupils' everyday lives. Teachers seek to make a connection with topics being addressed in the mainstream classroom. An emphasis is placed on both the acquisition of vocabulary and its application in sentence structures. Care is also taken to provide pupils with a meaningful communicative context in which to apply their learning. Judicious reference to and use of the pupils' first language during lessons is effective in creating a positive learning environment and cultivating a positive attitude to language learning through allowing the pupils to see the teacher as a language learner also.

3.2 Mathematics

A review of monthly progress records reveals that teachers are making provision for the teaching of this subject in a broad and balanced fashion. Objectives and skills are clearly specified in teachers' planning, the teaching of mathematical language is specifically attended to and provision is made for the development of mental computational and problem solving skills.

Visual and concrete resources are used effectively to introduce and to illustrate mathematical concepts. The incorporation of Mathematics into classroom routines assists pupils in applying their learning to real-life contexts.

There is scope, however to improve standards of pupils' attainment. Currently, insufficient attention is being paid to differentiating the learning experience for the weaker and the brighter pupils. To address this, it is recommended that teachers assess pupils' level of understanding prior to lessons and that they use this information to provide appropriately challenging learning experiences for pupils. There is, also, scope to develop the use of group work in order to provide pupils with more focused teaching thereby optimising their learning. It is suggested that more in-class support be provided in Mathematics whereby support teachers would work with the targeted pupils as part of a small class grouping. This would allow for more concentrated work around the manipulation of concrete materials and provide more opportunity for pupils to engage in structured discussion and collaborative learning with their peers. Such an approach would also assist in the monitoring of pupils' progress.

3.3 Visual Arts

The quality of teaching and learning in the Visual Arts is good in general, but there remains scope for development in some areas. Teachers' planning indicates that attention is being paid to developing pupils' awareness of the elements of art and that a broad and balanced curriculum is being implemented. Pupils have the opportunity to engage with a wide variety of media and techniques for making art. Teachers are successful in developing pupils' awareness of the properties of these media and guiding their experimentation with these media. The work of an interesting range of artists provides pupils with worthwhile opportunities to look and respond to art. It is suggested that these artists could be more specifically delineated per class level to enhance progression in pupils' learning. Pupils also have the opportunity to regularly present and discuss their own art work and that of their peers. It is suggested that this range of looking and responding activities be expanded from pictures to include objects and the elements of art in both the natural and built environment. Pupils' art work is attractively displayed and effectively captioned. An annual trip by second class to the national gallery provides a worthwhile dimension to school activities in looking and responding to the Visual Arts.

3.4 Assessment

The quality of assessment in the school is good. There is a comprehensive range of assessment modes in use within the school. These include teacher observation, the monitoring of pupils' written work, teacher-designed tasks and tests, standardised tests and diagnostic tests.

A commendable emphasis is placed on monitoring the progress of pupils in the infant classes in order to provide additional support as early as possible. Standardised test results are recorded and filed with appropriate care. These results should now be analysed and discussed annually by teachers order to identify any problem areas that need to be addressed in the following school year. As part of this process, it is also suggested that the school develops a system for tracking pupils' results on an individual basis from year to year.

A current priority for the school is to develop a record system that will facilitate communication between teachers at the handover of pupils from year to year. As part of this work, it is suggested that teachers develop common criteria for the compilation of pupils' portfolios. This would assist in optimising the extent to which existing compilations of pupils' work illustrate progression in pupils' learning in key areas of the curriculum.

4 QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

Additional support is provided to pupils identified with special educational needs in a pleasant and affirming manner by means of effectively structured lessons which are appropriately paced and make use of a variety of activities suitable to pupils' needs. The duration of lessons takes account of the particular needs of pupils. In some instances, however, the objectives set for particular groups are too general, and, as a consequence, lessons are not sufficiently focused. This results in difficulty in monitoring pupils' progress. It is, therefore, recommended that more specific objectives be set.

It is effective practice that additional support for pupils is provided in a variety of settings encompassing both the withdrawal and the in-class model of support. Support is provided to individuals and to small groups. It is notable that in some group activities pupils have opportunities to work with their more able peers. It is suggested that further in-class support be provided in Mathematics whereby the support teacher would work with the targeted pupils as part of a small class grouping. An increased emphasis on in-class support would also help to optimise learning for a small group of pupils who attend more than one support teacher.

While there is evidence of communication and collaboration between the support setting and the mainstream setting, it is recommended that this could be developed further in order to provide pupils with a more coherent programme in the development of their writing skills. It would also be useful if support teachers could make the link between the support setting and the classroom setting more explicit for pupils and to encourage the pupils, particularly the older pupils, to discuss how learning in the support setting is enhancing their learning in the classroom setting.

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

There is a small number of pupils from the Traveller community attending the school and they receive additional support from a resource teacher for travellers. There is a need for this provision to more precisely identify and link with pupils' learning needs particularly in terms of supporting their learning in the mainstream classroom. Since these pupils receive support on a withdrawal basis and that some of them attend more than one support teacher, there is a risk of discontinuities for these pupils in their experience of classroom learning. The provision of more in-class support is recommended to bring greater continuity to these pupils' experience of learning.

5 CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- A spirit of community and collegiality permeates the life of the school; this contributes to the creation of a positive learning environment.
- The principal is effective in creating a collaborative working environment between all members of staff.
- There is a mutually respectful relationship between teachers and pupils and behaviour is managed very effectively.
- Teachers are very effective in delivering well-structured lessons in stimulating and well organised learning environments.
- Pupils' phonological awareness skills are being developed successfully and pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of letter sounds.

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

- The board needs to develop a pupil attendance strategy to address poor levels of attendance.
- There is a need to improve pupils' attainment levels in Mathematics. To assist in addressing this issue, it is suggested that support teachers work in the classroom with the mainstream teachers to allow for more focused work with concrete materials, more discussion and more peer-learning.
- It is recommended that the level of communication and collaboration between the support and the mainstream setting should be developed further in order to provide pupils with a more coherent programme in the development of their writing skills.
- The school should consider the dissemination of school reports at a date earlier than the last week of June to facilitate parents who may wish to discuss the content of these reports with their child's teacher.
- To enhance their impact on pupils' learning, curriculum plans should address the standards to be achieved at each class level and indicate how teaching methodologies and approaches are developed across the class levels.

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 and staff are generally happy with the content of the Report and found many of the suggestions useful.

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

1. The Board, in consultation with the staff have developed an attendance strategy though our EWO has confirmed that levels of absenteeism are not high for a junior school.
2. Attainment in Mathematics is being monitored and there was an improvement in the Micra-T results in the summer term.
3. School reports were disseminated earlier in June 2010.
4. Suggested improvements in our curriculum plans are being considered.