

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Scoil Treasa
Firhouse, Dublin 14
Uimhir rolla:19565G**

Date of inspection: 1 February 2010



**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**

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Scoil Treasa 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 History. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

INTRODUCTION – SCHOOL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Scoil Treasa is a Catholic, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. It caters for pupils from third to sixth class, the majority of whom transfer from its sister junior school with which it has established strong links. 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	431
Mainstream classes in the school	15
Teachers on the school staff	23
Mainstream class teachers	15
Teachers working in support roles	7
Special needs assistants	5

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit, mission or vision

The school's stated mission is to encourage its pupils to realise their potential in a happy, secure and friendly environment. It aims to promote their spiritual, social, physical and aesthetic development while placing emphasis on their pastoral care. The school's commitment to these stated aims is reflected in the supportive school atmosphere, the positive interactions amongst the members of the school community and the exceptional commitment of staff to a broad range of extra-curricular activities. The Catholic ethos of the school is also manifest in the regular whole-school assemblies, classroom displays and prayers, and in the regular visits by the school's chaplain. In accordance with the Education Welfare Act 2000, the board has produced an attendance policy that incorporates strategies to promote pupil attendance.

1.2 Board of management

The board of management is constituted properly and meets at least six times annually. The minutes of these meetings are recorded appropriately. The treasurer provides a financial report at each meeting and the financial accounts are audited annually in compliance with section 18(1) of the *Education Act 1998*. The chairperson maintains very regular formal and informal contact with the principal and staff. A strong sense of common purpose is evident amongst the board members who are allocated specific tasks. The board is commended on progressing an ongoing maintenance programme, in addition to a building programme, which facilitates an attractive and safe school environment. Those involved in the maintenance and cleaning of the school are

complimented on their contribution towards maintaining a clean and safe environment for staff and pupils.

Of ongoing concern to the board are safety issues related to the open access of the school site and it continues to pursue appropriate channels for the provision of perimeter fencing. The board ensures that the school complies with Department of Education and Skills (DES) guidelines in relation to the length of the school year, the length of the school day, the allocation of pupils and the retention of pupils.

1.3 In-school management

The quality of leadership in the school is very good. The principal exhibits well-honed organisational and interpersonal skills that greatly facilitate the smooth and efficient day-to-day operation of the school. He identifies his primary focus as enabling the pupils to learn in a happy, supportive and welcoming environment that nurtures their self-esteem. To this end, he facilitates distributive leadership in curriculum areas and visits classrooms regularly where he knows each pupil by name. His leadership style promotes a culture of teamwork and working relationships within the school are characterised by collegiality, mutual respect and open communication.

The principal is supported effectively by the deputy principal, two assistant principals and six special duties teachers. These posts, which are based on the needs of the school and reviewed annually, reflect a balanced remit of duties in accordance with Circular 07/03. The curriculum leaders support curriculum implementation by leading in-school planning days, co-ordinating whole-school plans, acquiring resources and sharing good practice, which they have gained from in-career development, with colleagues. Monthly management meetings and regular staff meetings facilitate effective communication between the in-school leadership team and staff.

1.4 Management of relationships and communication with the school community

Scoil Treasa is commended on its open-door policy which was identified by the board, the parents' association and the staff as one of the key strengths of the school. The fact that several parents are past pupils of the school serves to enhance the school's relationship with its community. The school secretary contributes very effectively to the welcoming atmosphere of the school. In addition to the approachability of staff, the school has also established an effective range of more formal communication channels. On first contact with the school, parents are provided with an attractive school brochure. They are also directed to the regularly-updated school website that contains links to pertinent policies in addition to photographs and accounts of school events and achievements. The school communicates regularly with the parent body through newsletters, the website and texting whilst the pupil journal serves to facilitate communication between parents and teachers. The pupils also produce an annual magazine which is published and circulated within the school community.

The school has an active parents' association that is affiliated to the National Parents Council (NCP). The association, which communicates with the parents via a termly newsletter and regular letters home, is currently working with the school to establish a link on the school website. The representatives meet regularly with the school principal. The association supports the work of the school through assisting with extra-curricular activities in addition to assisting with the bi-annual school productions and art exhibitions. Members also provide hospitality at school functions and organise a broad range of activities to promote interactions amongst the members of the school community whilst raising funds for the school.

1.5 Management of pupils

The management of pupils is very good. The teachers are clearly committed to the general welfare and pastoral care of their pupils and a mutually-respectful and caring atmosphere is evident in the school. The school's code of behaviour, which promotes self-discipline and encompasses positive-behaviour strategies, outlines the expectations for pupil behaviour clearly. The pupils are commended on their excellent behaviour and application to learning. They participate enthusiastically and with commitment in the wide range of extra-curricular activities that promote teamwork. The school is commended on enabling them to participate in decision-making pertaining to school matters through the recent establishment of a student council.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 Whole-school and classroom planning

The quality of whole-school planning is very good. The coherent school plan includes relevant organisational, administrative and curriculum policies. These policies are available in the school office and some are also accessible on the school website. The school also provides each teacher with an annually-updated soft copy of the plan. In the development of the plan, organisational policies are discussed and agreed at board level whilst curriculum policies, which have been ratified by the board, are produced by the post-holders in conjunction with staff. A consultative role is afforded to parents in the formulation of some policies including the code of behaviour and the homework policy.

In designing the school plan, the staff has availed of the guidance of the support services and has established a cyclical process to facilitate its systematic review. The curriculum policies promote breadth and balance in the delivery of the curriculum. The well-organised, soft-copy format provides ready access to a broad range of resources and also facilitates the classroom planning process.

The quality of teachers' individual classroom planning is good. Year-group teachers are enabled to meet on a monthly basis to plan collaboratively and each teacher produces long-term and short-term plans of work diligently. In the best instances, these plans are clearly informed by the school plan and are underpinned by specific learning objectives. To further enhance all pupils' learning, consideration should now be given to making the provision for differentiated teaching and learning more explicit. The school has adopted a common format for monthly progress records. Copies of individual pupil learning profiles (IPLPs) and individual learning plans (IEPs) are available in all teachers' plans where applicable. Each teacher is commended on preparing a broad and appropriate range of resources and illustrative materials in addition to establishing aesthetically-pleasing classroom environments that serve to both promote and celebrate learning.

2.2 Child protection policy and procedures

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Department of Education and Skills Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 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

I múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge, tá éagsúlacht le sonrú ó rang go rang ó thaobh caighdeáin de. Cuireann na múinteoirí ar fad ceachtanna atá téama-lárnach i láthair de réir mar atá sé leagtha síos sa phlean scoile agus baineann siad úsáid as réimse leathan áiseanna chun suim na ndaltaí a mhúscailt agus chun cur lena gcumas tuisceana. Ar an iomlán, réitíonn na modhanna teagaisc leis an gcuraclam agus leagtar béim chuif ar an gcur chuige cumarsáide. Is í an Ghaeilge an teanga teagaisc sna ranganna ar fad, agus i gcuid de na ranganna úsáideann na múinteoirí í mar theanga cumarsáide ar bhonn teagmhásach i rith an lae. Ins na ranganna éagsúla, fobraíonn na múinteoirí scileanna éisteachta na ndaltaí trí úsáid a bhaint as amhráin, rannta agus cluichí. Ins na cásanna is fearr, féachann na múinteoirí chuige go ndírítear aird ar leith ar fhrásaí agus ar fhoclóir nua, agus soláthraíonn siad deiseanna do na daltaí páirt a ghlacadh i ngníomhaíochtaí beirte agus i rólghlacadh ionas go mbeidh deis acu a gcumas labhartha a fhorbairt ar bhealach cruthaitheach. Moltar úsáid a bhaint as na straitéisí seo sna ranganna ar fad agus go gcuirfí ar chumas na ndaltaí ní hamháin ceisteanna a fhreagairt, ach iad a chur chomh maith. Ins na meánranganna agus ins na hardranganna araon, tá neart ábhair i bprionta sa timpeallacht. Díríonn na múinteoirí sin aird mar is cuif ar mhúineadh scileanna léitheoireachta agus baineann na daltaí amach caighdeán maith líofachta agus tuisceana i gcoitinne. Tugtar aird mar is cuif ar mhúineadh na gramadaí. I gcoitinne, baintear úsáid as téacslabhair chun tacú leis na daltaí agus iad ag tabhairt faoin scríbhneoireacht. B'fhiú plé a dhéanamh ar chur chuige sa scoil uile ar mhúineadh na scríbhneoireachta, scríbhneoireacht neamhspleách agus scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach san áireamh.

Irish

The standard of teaching and learning in Irish is varied. In line with the school plan, all teachers present theme-based lessons and make use of a broad range of resources to stimulate the pupils' interest and facilitate their comprehension. In general, the teaching methods are in keeping with the curriculum and appropriate emphasis is placed on the communicative approach in most classrooms. In all classes, Irish is used as the medium of instruction and, in some classes, the teachers communicate incidentally through the language over the course of the school day. Across the school, pupils' listening skills are developed through the use of songs, rhymes and games. In the best instances, the teachers make very good provision for the explicit teaching of new phrases and vocabulary, and for paired activities and role-play to enable pupils to develop their spoken competence in a creative manner. It is recommended that these good practices be adopted in all classrooms and that all pupils are enabled to ask as well as answer questions. A print rich environment is established in the middle and senior classes. These teachers pay due regard to the teaching of reading and the standard of reading is generally good. Due regard is paid to the teaching of grammar. In general, textbooks are used to scaffold the pupils' writing. Consideration should now be given to devising a whole-school approach to the teaching of independent and creative writing.

English

The teaching of English is good. Across the school, the pupils' oral language skills are developed effectively through well-structured lessons that make good provision for both language enrichment and its application. The pupils engage confidently and articulately in discussions and, in the senior classes, are enabled to develop debating skills. All classrooms provide print-rich environments and host class libraries. The pupils in third class also engage enthusiastically in paired-reading sessions with the pupils in fifth class. As they progress through the school, the pupils are enabled to engage with a variety of texts including poetry and class novels. Best practice includes the promotion of expressive reading and the skilful use of higher-order questioning to promote and enhance responding to text. Many pupils read with fluency and expression and exhibit good comprehension skills. To further enhance their attainment in reading, it is recommended that the school extend its provision for the explicit teaching of specific reading skills. As they progress through the school, pupils are given frequent opportunities to engage in independent writing across a broad variety of genres. Good provision is made for the teaching of grammar linked to the pupils' writing and provision is also made for the editing of work before publication. To build upon this good practice, it is recommended that the school review its approach to writing to both facilitate a cohesive whole-school, systematic approach to the teaching of genres and enable the pupils to redraft their work in the light of formative feedback.

3.2 Mathematics

Overall, the teaching of Mathematics is very good with pupils displaying good levels of attainment. All classrooms have relevant mathematical posters and displays in addition to an appropriate range of resources to support the pupils' learning. Lessons are well structured and, in line with the agreed whole-school approach, make very good provision for mental mathematic starters. All teachers make judicious use of concrete apparatus to illuminate concepts, consolidate understanding and facilitate active learning. Due emphasis is placed on the acquisition of number facts, on developing the skills of estimation and on enabling the pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding to real-life situations. To complement this good practice, it is recommended that pupils be enabled to engage in open-ended investigations. Appropriate provision is made for all other curriculum strands with good provision made for hands-on activities to enhance the pupils' understanding. To facilitate breadth and balance in the pupils' learning, consideration should be given to reviewing the presentation of the various curriculum strands over the course of the academic year. The pupils are encouraged to present their work systematically and this is monitored diligently by the teachers.

3.3 History

The standard of teaching and learning in History is very good. As they progress through the school, the pupils are introduced to a broad range of topics and are enabled to engage in project work. Best practice observed makes provision for the application of both investigative and critical-thinking skills through the effective use of resources and active engagement in interviewing, collaborative activities and project work. Some provision is also made for the use of the local environment as an historical resource. Pupils exhibit good levels of engagement, particularly when participating in collaborative group investigations. In some instances, it is recommended that teachers follow the school plan more closely and reduce the number of topics currently explored to enable them to place additional emphasis on the development and application of the pupils' skills as historians. All classrooms have relevant displays and age-appropriate timelines that enable the pupils to develop their sense of chronology. The school is commended on producing a good range of resource packs, which contain photographs, relevant posters and documentary evidence, and on establishing a collection of artefacts. To complement

this good work, consideration should be given to the provision of an interactive investigative area in all classrooms.

3.4 Assessment

Across the school, individual teachers use a variety of assessment modes including teacher observation, teacher-designed tests and tasks, checklists and observation notes. Consideration should now be given to enabling the pupils to engage in both peer and self-assessment. From third to sixth class, the school administers standardised tests annually to assess the pupils' attainment in both literacy and mathematics. The results of these tests, which are shared with parents, are used to track the attainment of pupils in addition to assisting with the identification of those who are likely to benefit from supplementary teaching. The school computerises the resultant data and has started to analyse it to track the progress of individual cohorts of pupils. To complement this good practice, consideration should be given to using the data to target and monitor the impact of curriculum initiatives and also to inform the provision for differentiation. In the learning support settings, the teachers administer an appropriate range of diagnostic tests, the results of which are used to inform both IPLPs and IEPs.

Appropriate provision is made for formal communication with parents regarding their children's progress. Parent-teacher consultations are held in the autumn term and parents are also informed that they are welcome to make an appointment to discuss their child's progress during the school year. Parents are also provided with an annual end-of-year report, a copy of which is maintained in the school.

4. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

4.1 Pupils with special educational needs

The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. The special education team (SET) comprises both learning support and resource teachers who provide support in both literacy and numeracy with some pupils receiving support in both areas. The school policy promotes early-intervention strategies and the provision of appropriate support based on the results of diagnostic tests and teacher observation. It also incorporates the staged approach. In line with good practice, parents' formal consent is sought prior to the pupils attending lessons. Special needs assistants (SNAs) are deployed appropriately and carry out their duties conscientiously.

The overall quality of teaching in special education settings is very good. The pupils clearly enjoy and engage effectively in the well-structured and well-paced lessons that incorporate a broad range of appropriate pedagogies including activity-based learning. Supplementary teaching primarily comprises withdrawal in both individual and group settings with some provision made for in-class support. Consideration should now be given to extending the provision for in-class support where feasible.

IPLPs and IEPs, which are informed by psychological reports as appropriate, are drawn up by the SET teachers in conjunction with the class teachers and serve to inform short-term planning. The IEPs are shared with parents and form the basis of review meetings. The quality of the agreed learning targets for pupils varies across the team; generally, the targets should be more specific so that they serve to inform, monitor and track the pupils' progress.

The SET teachers consult regularly with the mainstream teachers on an informal basis and meet with one another twice a year primarily to agree administrative matters. To enable them to work more cohesively as a team and to share their collective knowledge and expertise, it is recommended that provision be made to enable the SET teachers to meet on a regular basis.

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

A teacher provides support to pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). EAL teaching is exemplified by well-structured lessons, varied teaching methodologies, group work and the judicious use of resources. All programmes are drawn from the themes of the Integrate Ireland Language Programme and the pupils' competence is assessed through the Primary Assessment Kit.

5. CONCLUSION

The school has strengths in the following areas:

- A strong sense of common purpose is evident amongst the board members who fulfil their duties competently and maintain a visible presence in the school.
- The quality of leadership is very good and the highly-committed and hard-working staff members work co-operatively in a spirit of mutual respect.
- The parent association provides a high level of support to the school.
- The quality of teaching of Mathematics is very good with teachers making judicious use of concrete apparatus to illuminate concepts, consolidate understanding and facilitate active learning.
- The pupils are commended on their excellent behaviour, application to learning and enthusiastic participation in the wide range of extra-curricular activities that promote teamwork.
- The school environment, which is warm and welcoming, hosts an impressive range of displays that both promote and celebrate the pupils' learning.

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

- The school should adopt a whole-school approach to the teaching of Irish that reflects the best practice evident in several classrooms.
- Consideration should be given to using assessment data to target and monitor the impact of curriculum initiatives and also to further inform the provision for differentiation.
- The school should review its approach to writing to both facilitate a cohesive whole-school, systematic approach to the teaching of genres and enable the pupils to redraft their work in the light of formative feedback.

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.

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 of Scoil Treasa welcomes the W.S.E. report as it affirms the excellent work of all staff/school community. The board welcomes the very positive findings of the report while also acknowledging the constructive comments and recommendations. We wish to acknowledge the courtesy/professionalism of the inspectors during their time in our school.

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 of Management is committed to implementing all of the recommendations of the report. The staff has already begun the process. To date the key recommendations acted upon include:

1. A review of our Whole School Plan for Gaeilge.
2. A review of our Whole School Plan in English with particular emphasis on “Writing Process/Genres of Writing”
3. The use of assessment data throughout the school.