

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

**Whole School Evaluation**

**REPORT**

**Scoil Naomh Colmcille**  
**Donaghmede, Dublin 13**  
**Uimhir rolla: 19611K**

**Date of inspection: 30 April 2015**



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

## 1. Introduction

A Whole-School Evaluation was undertaken in Scoil Naomh Colmcille in April 2015. This is a senior school catering for boys and girls between third and sixth class. There are also three classes for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and one class for pupils with Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD). Attendance levels are good. The school serves the parish of Donaghmede and is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The school participates in the School Completion Programme, which provides the school with additional funding to support pupils' learning. During this whole-school evaluation, provision for Irish, English, Mathematics and Physical Education was evaluated. 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.

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

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

- The board of management demonstrates a clear understanding of its role and it performs its duties with good attention to the long-term development of the school and its effective functioning.
- The leadership of the principal is of a very high quality. It is focused effectively on creating a learning environment that is about advancing pupils' well-being and learning.
- The quality of the school's engagement with the self-evaluation process is very good.
- The positive and ordered learning environment within the school contributes to the very good behaviour of pupils that was observed during the evaluation.
- The quality of teaching is very good. It is characterised by a strong commitment among teachers to attaining high standards in pupils' learning.
- Consistent whole-school approaches to the teaching of English and Mathematics are resulting in very good-quality learning experiences for pupils.
- Tá caighdeán an Ghaeilge labhartha go han-mhaith. Tá raon leathan foclóra agus abairtí ar eolas ag na daltaí agus tá siad in ann a n-abairtí féin a struchtúró i gceart. *The standard of pupils' spoken Irish is very good. Pupils know a wide range of vocabulary and sentences and they are able to structure their own sentences correctly.*
- The quality of provision for Physical Education is very good.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The school needs to review current provision for learning support, including the co-ordination of learning support, in order to optimise the coherency of learning experiences for pupils.
- There is a need for the school to develop a policy of staff rotation. Such a policy would enable teachers to move between the different learning settings within the school and so contribute to the building of professional capacity.

### 3. Quality of School Management

- The work of the board of management is of a high quality. The board is properly constituted, is aware of its responsibilities and undertakes its work in a conscientious, coherent and effective manner. The role of the board to support the work of the principal is particularly well developed. A notable feature of the board's work is the regular attendance of members at school events so that they are aware of and can support pupils' learning. Teachers are facilitated in accessing continuous professional development (CPD) and good systems are in place to share learning with their colleagues. An on-going area of priority for the board is improving pupils' punctuality. Appropriate measures are in place for bringing about an improvement in this area. These measures include the recording of late arrivals, regular reminders to parents and effective systems for ensuring an orderly beginning to the school-day. In line with an expected substantial increase in the pupil population in the area and the expansion of the school to accommodate this increase, a policy of staff rotation should be developed. Such a policy would enable teachers to move between the different learning settings within the school and so contribute to the building of professional capacity,
- The work of the in-school management team is highly commendable. The in-school management team comprises the principal, the deputy principal and a special duties teacher. The work of the principal is of a very high quality. In addition to overseeing the smooth running of the school, the principal's leadership is focused effectively on creating a learning environment that advances pupils' well-being and learning. Other members of the in-school management team perform their responsibilities in a methodical and flexible manner. It is good practice that members of the in-school management team have assumed a responsibility for leading the development of literacy and numeracy as part of the school's process of self-evaluation and school improvement. More regular in-school management meetings would assist in the monitoring of literacy and numeracy initiatives. Some of the responsibilities of the in-school management team relate to activities that would lend themselves to enhancing the involvement of parents in school life. Consideration could usefully be given to inviting the parents' association to organise and implement these activities. This would contribute to the on-going viability of the parents' association, which is a concern for both the school and the current members of the parents' association. The parents' association could usefully seek advice from the National Parents' Council (Primary) in this regard.
- The management of pupils' behaviour, as observed during the evaluation, is of a very high standard. An ordered, positive learning environment has been created within the school. Teachers interact with pupils in an affirming and respectful manner. The quality of interaction among pupils observed during the evaluation was also of a very high quality.
- The school is well resourced in terms of space and supports for teaching and learning. An appropriate emphasis is being placed on incorporating information and communication Technology (ICT) into lessons as a tool for teaching and learning. There is scope to develop the play-area for pupils in the ASD unit as a brighter and more attractive space.
- The management of communication with parents is very good. Effective methods of communication with parents regarding their child's progress are in place. The information being communicated is clear and useful. Annual report cards provide focused comments and constructive suggestions to parents on how they can support their children's learning. In a meeting with representatives of the parents as part of the evaluation process, they expressed strong levels of satisfaction with the running of the school and the children's progress in their learning. These levels of satisfaction were also confirmed in a questionnaire completed by parents. There is a lack of certainty evident in the

questionnaire responses of some parents with regard to how effectively communication is managed between them and the parents' association and the board of management. This lack of certainty should be explored further by the board and the parents' association.

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

- The quality of organisational planning is very good. The smooth running of the school and the due regard paid to creating an ordered and positive learning environment for pupils are testament to the effectiveness of these policies. The school is proactive in raising parents' awareness of key organisational policies such as the anti-bullying policy and the policy for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). An effective process of curriculum planning is in place with teachers working in subject groups to plan in different curricular areas. The most successful curriculum plans focus on documenting agreed practices to enhance progression and continuity in pupils' learning. The creation of a synopsis sheet, which outlines all the key decisions taken by the school to guide curriculum implementation, is a useful resource for teachers.
- The quality of teachers' planning is good. Long-term and short-term plans are in place and almost all plans are effective in identifying learning objectives, content and activities. Monthly progress records are successful in documenting content covered. A section encouraging teachers to reflect on the implementation of the targets identified in the School Improvement Plan would add to the usefulness of the monthly progress records.
- The quality of school self-evaluation is very good. Careful consideration has been given to identifying aspects of practice for improvement and worthwhile plans have been put in place to bring these improvements about. It is very commendable that teachers are implementing these improvements in a systematic manner to good effect. The school improvement plan is communicated in a clear manner to parents.
- 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

- Tá cáilíocht an teagaisc, na foghlama agus gnótháichtaíl na ndaltaí go maith sa Ghaeilge. Tá struchtúr cinnte ag gabháil le ceachtanna agus tá modhanna múinte cuí in úsáid ag na hoidí. Tá scileanna tuisceana na ndaltaí forbartha go breá. Tá cumas labhartha na ndaltaí go han-mhaith. Tá raon leathan foclóra agus abairtí ar eolas ag na daltaí agus tá siad in ann a n-abairtí féin a struchturú i gceart. Is breá an cleachtas é go bhfuil dánta curtha de ghlanmheabhair ag na daltaí. Léann na daltaí le foghraíocht, líofacht agus tuiscint bhreá. Chun dúshlán breise a thabhairt dóibh, moltar ceisteanna níos leithne a chur ar na daltaí. Cé go mbíonn na daltaí ag scríobh go rialta, is gá do na hoidí botúin na ndaltaí a aithint agus a cheartú go sistéamach agus cruinneas na ndaltaí a fhorbairt. *The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Irish is good. It is good practice that pupils have committed poems to memory. There is a definite structure to lessons and appropriate teaching methodologies are in use by teachers. Pupils' ability to understand Irish is well developed. Pupils' speaking skills are very good. Pupils know a wide range of vocabulary and sentences and they are able to structure their own sentences correctly. Pupils read*

*with a good level of correct pronunciation, fluency and understanding. To challenge them further, it is advised that more challenging questions be posed to pupils. Even though pupils write regularly, teachers need to identify and correct pupils' errors systematically and develop pupils' accuracy.*

- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is of a high standard. Pupils are given a range of opportunities to communicate in different settings and they demonstrate a very good ability to express their viewpoints coherently and confidently. A very effective whole-school approach to the teaching of reading is implemented systematically throughout the school. Lessons are clearly structured and well paced, and teachers' questioning engages pupils well in the texts being read. Pupils are able to talk with confidence about how their reading skills are developing. The school has begun to expand upon its teaching of reading skills to include guided reading. An example of this approach being implemented very skilfully was observed during this evaluation. Careful attention is paid to developing pupils' abilities to write in a range of genres with due regard to relevant structures and language features. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the conventions of these genres. Teachers have also been very effective in developing pupils' capacity to structure and edit their work.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Mathematics is very good. Lessons have a clear structure, teacher-pacing is well judged and the pupils demonstrate a confidence and enthusiasm for engaging in mathematical work. It is very effective practice that a whole-school emphasis is being placed on the development of pupils' mathematical thinking in a systematic and coherent manner. There is scope for some of this work to be done as pair and small-group work. Teachers could also usefully take more time to provide pupils with feedback regarding progress in their mental mathematics. They should also encourage pupils to reflect on how they feel they are progressing in their learning. Pupils demonstrate a very good ability to engage in co-operative problem-solving, although provision should be extended from word-problems to a broader range of problem-solving activities. The practice of grouping pupils by ability for Mathematics should be kept under review and additional opportunities found for pupils to engage in mixed-ability learning, particularly in terms of topics that lend themselves to active learning with a strong connection to the lives of pupils.
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in Physical Education (PE) is very good. Lessons in all settings are correctly structured, effectively paced, well managed and appropriately challenging. A notable practice was the attention of a number of teachers to ensuring that pupils engaged in warm-up and cool-down activities correctly and carefully. This good practice should characterise the beginning and conclusion of all PE lessons. The participation of some pupils from the ASD unit within the mainstream PE lesson is very worthwhile and, in an observed lesson, pupils from the ASD unit were well supported by the teachers and other pupils in activities. A range of sporting activities is provided by external tutors in support of the PE curriculum. In some instances, teachers and tutors encouraged pupils to reflect on their learning at the end of the PE lesson; this is very worthwhile practice and could be extended to all PE lessons. There are occasions where a greater flexibility in the implementation of the yearly scheme would allow teachers to improve the correlation between the skills being developed in PE lessons with the skills being developed by the external tutors. This improved correlation of skills would allow pupils a further opportunity to consolidate and apply their learning.

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and pupil is very good. A broad range of interesting learning experiences is provided for pupils. Teaching is of a very high quality. Lessons have clear and suitably challenging objectives which are shared with pupils. Lessons are structured appropriately. Teachers' questioning of pupils is effective in establishing and consolidating understanding. Sufficiently detailed records of pupils' progress are maintained, although there is scope to expand record-keeping of pupils' progress in station-teaching and group-teaching contexts. The presentation and monitoring of pupils' written work are good. Pupils engage in their lessons with interest and enthusiasm. There is a strong sense of teachers, staff and pupils working together to create a productive and affirming learning environment. To enhance the current system for involving pupils in the life of the school, the school should consider extending its current system of Coiste na nDaltaí (Students' Committee) into a Student Council.

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

- The quality of education provided for pupils in the ASD classes and the specific learning difficulty (SLD) class is of a good standard: pupils are making good progress. Planning for pupils is underpinned by the careful identification of pupils' needs and the setting of clear targets to meet these needs. In most instances, these targets are effective in describing the desired learning that will support the achievement of the desired outcome. In some instances, however, targets need to be more specific if they are to lead to teaching that is at an appropriately focused level and that will optimise pupils' learning. Teachers adopt a range of approaches to recording pupils' progress. Within this practice, there is a variation in the level and type of detail being recorded. A common approach to recording pupils' progress with regard to targets would be helpful as it would assist in maintaining an overview of pupils' progress as they proceed through the school. To achieve this, clearly defined success criteria need to be identified by all teachers in their planning. In all settings, there are examples of practices that are effective in creating good learning environments. Examples of these good-quality practices include visual organisers, relevant, stimulating displays, concrete and visual resources, well-managed routines, smooth transitions between learning activities and the effective use of space to create a range of learning contexts. In some settings, however, there is scope to incorporate more of these good practices, thereby enhancing pupils' engagement in lessons.
- Good-quality teaching approaches were observed in all special education settings with an emphasis on clear explanations and consolidation. In most settings, there was an appropriate balance between whole-class, group-work and pair-work. In all settings, lessons are clearly and coherently structured. Engagement between teachers and pupils is affirming, respectful and effective in encouraging and maintaining pupils' attention to learning. The practice of seeking out opportunities to facilitate pupils to engage with their peers in some mainstream activities is well thought out, well managed and leading to positive interactions between pupils.
- Special-needs assistants (SNAs) play a key role in supporting the provision of good-quality learning experiences for pupils. Their interactions with pupils are affirming and they work well with teachers to create coherent and holistic learning experiences for pupils. It is very commendable that SNAs have a formal role in contributing to the development and review of pupils' individual education plans and in contributing to meetings with parents regarding pupils' needs and progress.

- The quality of provision for pupils in receipt of additional support in English language, literacy and numeracy is good. The needs of pupils requiring additional support are carefully and clearly identified in the planning process. Pupils requiring support with English as an additional language (EAL) are identified appropriately using appropriate assessment procedures. For all pupils requiring additional support, there is a correlation between the established needs, the learning targets and the types of lesson activities being provided. In line with the good practice in evidence, pupils are aware of and engage with the learning objectives that have been set. Good-quality teaching approaches being implemented include the use of visual resources, stories and games. However, among these approaches, there is scope to develop a more structured and progressive approach to oral news-telling. All interactions between teachers and pupils are affirming and encouraging. The provision of in-class support observed during the evaluation was good. In-class support would be enhanced, however, through the development of an agreed mechanism for recording teachers' observations of pupils' learning. In its on-going review of how support is provided and co-ordinated, the school should consider re-focusing current provision towards a greater emphasis on in-class support in order to optimise the coherency of learning experiences for pupils and the best use of teaching personnel.

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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 of Scoil Cholmcille welcomes the affirmative report received from the Inspectorate which has highlighted the productive, ordered, inclusive and supportive learning environment created by teachers, support staff and pupils working together.

The Board welcomes the recognition of teachers' commitment to attain high standards and the consequent high quality teaching and learning that is evident throughout the school.

The Board commends pupils on actively engaging with their learning as well as the positive interactions with fellow pupils and staff that are evident. The school will develop the roles of the current Coiste Na nDaltaí further as discussed.

The Board of Management wishes to thank all the partners involved in making Scoil Cholmcille a caring, happy, inclusive and high quality learning environment.

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

