

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Fiachra's Senior National School
Beaumont, Montrose, Dublin 5
Uimhir rolla: 19628E

Date of inspection: 4 October 2010



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

1. Introduction

St Fiachra's Senior National School is a large, co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It caters for children who live in the parish of Beaumont and the surrounding areas of Dublin 5. There are 655 pupils enrolled in the school. During the Whole-School Evaluation inspectors visited fifteen mainstream class settings and five support teaching settings and observed teaching and learning. 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 operates as an effective and cohesive organisation, with the active collaboration of all members of the school community.
- The quality of leadership provided by the principal and in-school management team is very good, and guides the ongoing development of the school.
- School planning processes are well developed. Planning is focused, deliberate and consultative. There are clear mechanisms for policy development and review.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the school is of a high standard. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, and in turn, pupils respond well and engage eagerly in learning.
- Planning for pupils with additional learning needs is collaborative and targeted and results in the provision of effective focused interventions to support pupils.

The following **main recommendation** is made:

- It is recommended that the practice of providing in-class learning support in literacy and numeracy be monitored and extended as appropriate throughout the school.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management works very effectively to guide the ongoing development of the school. It plays an active role in the development of school policy and facilitates the involvement of all members of the school community in the planning process. Specific roles are assigned to board members, who report regularly to the board on developments in their areas of responsibility. This is an efficient way of working. Record keeping arrangements are exemplary and detailed minutes of board meetings and correspondence are maintained. The board has an ongoing and prioritised plan for the upkeep and development of the school building and grounds.
- The in-school management team is a cohesive and committed group. It is led by a dynamic and perceptive principal, whose vision for the school is guided by his concern to promote the achievement of the full potential of each pupil. He supports the professional development of staff in a very practical and effective manner and he has established very

good mechanisms for communication with the school community. His high expectations and ambitions for the school are shared by the other members of the in-school management team who give of their expertise generously and who perform a broad range of curricular, organisational and pastoral duties diligently. Duties are reviewed regularly in order to ensure that leadership is provided in areas of priority for the school.

- Resources are managed very well. The school has a very good stock of resources to support teaching and learning.
- The management of pupils is of a high standard. Staff members interact with pupils in a pleasant and affirming manner. Equally, pupils respond positively and openly with staff and with each other. Their questionnaire responses indicate that they are treated fairly and that they enjoy their lessons and learning.
- The quality of communication among members of the school community is very good. Newsletters, homework journals and the school website facilitate regular contact between home and school.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The school planning process is well developed. All sections of the school community are represented in the collaborative development of policies. A full range of organisational and curriculum policies has been developed and all are reviewed cyclically.
- The board of management, principal and staff review the implementation of school policy carefully, and this review results in the formulation and revision of priorities for future planning. This process of continuous review and self-evaluation enhances the quality of school planning in all areas.
- Collaborative approaches are used effectively by classroom teachers in the preparation of long and short-term plans. Most plans include specific learning objectives and details of resources and methodologies to be used. Very good examples of teacher-designed resources and differentiated teaching strategies were noted during the evaluation.
- School authorities provided evidence that, in compliance with Primary Circular 0061/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools*. Evidence was provided to show 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.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- In the four curriculum subjects evaluated, lessons were well prepared and resourced. They had very good pace and direction and teachers used a variety of appropriate teaching methodologies. Teachers plan learning activities which challenge and involve pupils appropriately. They monitor pupils' engagement in lessons carefully and they use a variety of formal and informal assessment strategies. There is some scope for the wider use of collaborative learning approaches. Teachers make effective use of ICT to enhance lesson presentation but it is recommended that opportunities be provided for pupils to use computers more frequently.

- Cruthaítear atmaisféar dearfach don Ghaeilge sna rangseomraí agus ar fud na scoile agus sonraítear roinnt mhaith úsáide á baint as an teanga taobh amuigh de cheachtanna Gaeilge. Cuirtear béim chuí ar úsáid chumarsáideach na teanga agus ar rannpháirtíocht na ndaltaí uile sna gníomhaíochtaí foghlama a eagraítear le linn ceachtanna. Múintear an Ghaeilge go córasach, agus baintear feidhm thorthúil as raon maith áiseanna oiriúnacha. Léann na daltaí le muinín agus léiríonn siad tuiscint mhaith ar an ábhar léitheoireachta. Scríobhann siad cleachtaí éagsúla atá bunaithe ar shleachta ó leabhair shaothair de ghnáth, agus tá samplaí dá scríbhneoireacht phearsanta ar taispeáint i bhformhór de na seomraí ranga.
- *A positive atmosphere towards Irish is created in the classrooms and around the school and it is evident that a good deal of use is made of the language outside of Irish lessons. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the communicative use of the language and on the participation of all pupils during the learning activities that are organised during lessons. Irish is taught systematically and fruitful use is made of appropriate resources. The pupils read with confidence and they display good understanding of the reading material. They write a variety of exercises which are usually based on excerpts from workbooks, and there are samples of their personal writing on display in most classrooms.*
- The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in English is very good throughout the school. Discrete oral language lessons are well organised and well resourced, and facilitate the structured development of pupils' linguistic competence in English. Guided reading strategies are used very effectively to stimulate pupils' interest in a range of texts and to develop their comprehension skills. Pupils enjoy reading and they enthusiastically discuss the books they have read. Pupils write competently in a wide variety of genres.
- Teachers plan and deliver a structured learning programme which makes suitable provision for all strands of the curriculum in Mathematics. Lessons have very good pace and direction, making creative and effective use of concrete resources, information and communication technology, hands-on activities and discussion. Systematic and careful attention is paid to the development of mental mathematics. Provision for the active involvement of pupils is supported by the use of collaborative learning activities. A good emphasis is placed on plenary sessions. In certain classes, good provision is in place for linking lesson content to the experience and environment of the pupils and there is potential for making wider use of such approaches. Classroom displays are relevant and support pupils' learning. Teachers make very good use of assessment, most notably classroom observation and the regular monitoring of pupils' work in copybooks. In general, pupils are making very good progress in Mathematics.
- A high quality Physical Education programme encompasses all curriculum strands. Skills are taught in a focused manner through the use of well-chosen and challenging activities which motivate the pupils. Pupil involvement in lessons is characterised by their enthusiastic and committed participation. They display proficient abilities across a range of skills. Lessons make suitable provision for warm-up and cool-down activities. Very good use is made of equipment and facilities. Teachers monitor pupils' participation in lessons and they provide additional advice and support to individual pupils when appropriate.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The Special Education Team in the school works in a focused manner to address the needs of pupils with additional learning needs. The school's policy on special education provision is comprehensive. It has been devised through a collaborative approach in which support teachers and class teachers, parents, school management and external agencies were involved. It gives detailed guidance on how pupils are to be placed on the continuum of support that is provided in the school.
- Teacher planning for pupils is of high quality and is focused on specific learning needs and targets. Support in literacy and numeracy is provided through the withdrawal of individuals and groups. Lessons are stimulating and well structured. Pupils are motivated and participate in a range of well-resourced learning activities. They are given regular and formative feedback on their progress. The provision of in-class support has been introduced recently in some classes. It is recommended that this practice be monitored and extended as appropriate throughout the school.