

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Mary's Senior National School
Rowlagh, Dublin 22
Uimhir Rolla: 196471**

Date of inspection: 8 November 2010



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

1. Introduction

St Mary's SNS is a Catholic, co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. This school, which caters for pupils from third class to sixth class, shares its campus with St Mary's JNS with whom it maintains positive links. It participates in Band I of DEIS, has the services of a full-time home school community liaison (HSCL) coordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme. As a considerable number of the 212 pupils miss a significant number of school days, the school implements a range of strategies to promote attendance. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

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 functions effectively and is very supportive of the school.
- The proactive principal, who demonstrates well-honed organisational and management skills, exhibits the qualities of instructional leadership.
- The highly-committed teachers demonstrate the qualities of reflective practitioners.
- All staff contribute to the promotion of a pleasant, mutually-respectful school atmosphere that promotes the pupils' holistic development.
- The cohesive, whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematics promotes the active participation of pupils in stimulating, well-structured, differentiated lessons.
- All teachers have established attractive, well-resourced and comfortable reading corners.
- The pupils are commended on their courteous behaviour and on their application to learning.
- A palpable sense of pride in the school permeates the school community.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The systematic teaching of specific reading skills, including phonics, word-attack skills and higher-order reading skills, should be prioritised.
- The school should reflect on the role of language within the curriculum and promote the explicit teaching of subject-specific vocabulary.
- A consistent approach to target setting, based on the outcomes of diagnostic tests, should be adopted by all members of the special education needs team.

3. Quality of School Management

- The board of management functions effectively and is very supportive of the school. To ensure that all parents are informed of its work, it is recommended that the board circulate an annual report in accordance with s.21 *Education Act 1998*.

- The quality of leadership in the school is very good. The pro-active principal, who demonstrates well-honed organisational and management skills, exhibits the qualities of instructional leadership. She actively promotes the pupils' holistic development within a caring environment and facilitates distributive leadership amongst the staff. The in-school management team carry out an appropriate range of assigned duties conscientiously.
- The recently-renovated school, which is maintained to a high standard, provides an aesthetically-pleasing, well-organised and stimulating learning environment. It is complemented by an attractively-maintained school garden that is tended by the pupils. A good range of resources is available to both support and enhance teaching and learning.
- The management of pupils is excellent. The commitment and success of all staff, including teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs), secretary and caretaker, to the promotion of a calm and mutually-respectful atmosphere that fosters the pupils' self esteem is commended. The questionnaires indicate that all pupils feel safe at school. The school strategy 'Discipline-for-Learning' is applied consistently and the pupils' behaviour is excellent.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- The overall quality of school planning is good. The school plan is comprehensive. As reflected in the parent questionnaires, it is recommended that a greater role be afforded to parents in future revisions to pertinent policies. The school engages effectively in a range of self-evaluation strategies that include the monitoring of progress against DEIS targets, the ongoing review of policies and the analysis of standardised test data.
- All classroom teachers plan using an agreed school format. For most curriculum areas, these plans are informed by explicit objectives and provide for continuity and progression in learning. To address the pupils' varied learning needs, it is advised that there be greater clarity in relation to differentiation, assessment and subject-specific vocabulary.

Child protection policy and procedures

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

- Tá múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge ar chaighdeán maith. Baineann na múinteoirí úsáid as réimse leathan modhanna teagaisc, cluichí, ról-imirt agus gníomhaíochtaí beirte san áireamh. Sna cásanna is fearr, féachann siad chuige go soláthraítear deiseanna ar leith do na daltaí foclóir agus frásaí a fhoghlaim agus a úsáid. Is léir go bhfuil dearcadh dearfach ag na daltaí i leith na Gaeilge. Glacann na daltaí ar fad páirt san amhránaíocht agus sa véarsaíocht. Bunaítear na gníomhaíochtaí a bhaineann le léitheoireacht agus le scríbhneoireacht ar an gclár foilsithe atá in úsáid sa scoil, don chuid is mó. Moltar na gníomhaíochtaí seo a mhúnlú ionas go réiteoidh siad níos mó le cumas na bpáistí.

The teaching and learning of Irish is of a good standard. The teachers employ a wide range of methodologies including games, role-play and paired tasks. In the best instances, they make explicit provision for the specific teaching and application of both vocabulary and phrases. The pupils exhibit a positive attitude towards the language. All pupils engage in song-singing and the recitation of poetry. Reading and writing activities are primarily drawn from the school's commercial programme and the tailoring of these learning experiences to the pupils' abilities is advised.

- The school recognises that the raising of standards in literacy poses a significant challenge. To foster a love of reading, all teachers have established attractive, well-resourced reading corners, and provide for reading buddies, class novels and personal reading time. The school has adopted a consistent approach to the teaching of comprehension skills. It is recommended that the teaching of specific reading skills, including phonics, word-attack skills and higher-order reading skills, be prioritised. The teaching of reading should be based on instructional-level texts. As the school re-introduces a structured oral-language programme, clear language-learning targets should be identified for each class level. The teachers' active promotion of free writing encourages the pupil to write frequently across a range of genres. Teachers should now make provision for sustained engagement with a prescribed range of genres and enable the pupils to redraft their work in response to formative feedback.
- The teachers are commended on implementing a cohesive, whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematics. Intrinsic to this initiative is the adoption of Maths Recovery strategies in all classrooms, effective team teaching and active pupil participation in oral mathematics. All teachers present well-structured lessons that are informed by explicit learning objectives. Their regular monitoring of pupil progress, using a school-produced assessment tool, reflects steady improvement in the strand of number. To further support and scaffold learning, it is recommended that greater use be made of practical resources, manipulatives and visual prompts.
- Teaching and learning in History are of a good standard. Teachers provide a broad and balanced programme that places appropriate emphasis on personal and local history. In the best instances, excellent use is made of photographic evidence, communication and information technology (ICT), reference materials and purposeful group work to foster and develop the pupils' skills as historians. All classrooms exhibit stimulating displays and many host appropriate time-lines and maps. Consideration should be given to extending the provision for skills-based learning whilst reducing the emphasis on text-based sources of information.
- Overall, teaching and learning are of a good standard with some very good practice observed. The teachers present well-structured lessons, provide clear instructions, welcome pupils' questions and consolidate learning. Text books and worksheets are used judiciously, and lessons are enhanced by ICT. Pupils demonstrate care in the presentation of their work and pride in their achievements. Teaching primarily comprises competent, whole-class teaching. Greater differentiated teaching within the classroom settings is advised. As reflected in the pupils' questionnaires, teachers should extend the provision for both collaborative and cooperative activities. It is also advised that the school reflect on the role of language within the curriculum and promote the explicit teaching of subject-specific vocabulary to ensure that all pupils are enabled to access all curriculum areas.
- The teachers use an appropriate range of strategies to track their pupils' progress. There is some evidence, particularly in the area of mathematics, of this data being used to inform subsequent teaching and improve learning outcomes. All teachers correct the pupils' work regularly with some teachers providing constructive feedback. It is

recommended that this good practice be adopted by all teachers and that pupils be enabled to revise their work accordingly.

6. Quality of Supports for Pupils

- The overall provision for special education needs (SEN) is good. In line with recently-revised school policy, a continuum of support is implemented consistently and cohesively to accommodate and meet the varying needs of pupils. The intervention model incorporates both in-class support and withdrawal. It is advised that the supplementary teaching be in addition to the pupils' regular classroom programme. In the best instances, the SEN teachers provide structured, stimulating lessons that are informed by comprehensive programmes of learning. It is recommended that a consistent approach to target setting, based on the outcomes of the diagnostic tests, be adopted by all team members. The SNAs, who provide excellent support to individual pupils, contribute significantly to the life of the school.
- The whole-school approach to the care and welfare of all pupils is highly commended. Excellent supports are in place to meet the varying needs of pupils. Through the work of the HSCL, support teacher, CARE Team and external agencies, an effective range of programmes is provided.
- The school actively promotes an open-door policy, distributes regular newsletters and provides parents with copies of pertinent policies. It provides for annual parent/teacher meetings, pupil reports and meetings with parents of new entrants. Effective strategies, in collaboration with the junior school, ease the pupils' transition to third class. The HSCL pays regular home visits and also encourages parents to attend courses at school. The school maintains positive and constructive links with both external agencies and the local community.

Published June 2011