

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

St Fergal's SNS
Ballywaltrim, Bray,
Co. Wicklow
Uimhir rolla: 19654F

Date of inspection: 16 January 2012



1. Introduction

St Fergal's SNS Bray is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It caters for children from third to sixth class. At the time of inspection there were 259 pupils on rolls. Attendance in the school is generally good although a significant number of pupils have a history of absenteeism. Effective strategies are in place to address this and some improvements in attendance have been noted in recent years. The school participates in Band 2 of DEIS, shares the services of a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme. 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:

- St. Fergal's SNS is an inclusive school that welcomes all children and seeks to cater for the welfare of each individual pupil.
- The school is central to the local community and very good links have been fostered between the school, the local community and the parent body.
- A very good range of resources for teaching and learning is provided and the school building and grounds are very well maintained.
- There is good capacity, willingness and ability among the staff and board members to improve learning outcomes in the school.
- The board of management and the parents association are very supportive of principal, pupils and staff.
- The school has collated and analysed a range of useful assessment data in English and Mathematics.
- There is a cohesive and co-ordinated approach to the provision of support for targeted groups of pupils through the HSCL, the care team, school completion programme and other services.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The principal and management should prioritise the development of a new three-year DEIS action plan.
- All teachers should implement the actions and strategies identified in the DEIS plan in a cohesive, collaborative and systematic way.
- Differentiated programmes of learning, particularly in English and Mathematics, should be developed for all classes.
- The teaching of English and Mathematics requires systematic review in order to bring about improvements in pupil attainment.

3. Quality of School Management

- The recently appointed board of management is properly constituted and effectively led by an experienced and skilful chairperson. As overall enrolment is falling it is recommended that the board consider how this is going to impact on the school into the future in terms of plant, pupil cohort and school personnel and plan accordingly.

- The principal, having recently returned to the school after five years, has a positive vision for the school, effectively fosters collaboration and collegiality among the staff and is very cognisant of the welfare of both staff and pupils. The in-school management team members are diligent and have clearly defined responsibilities, including responsibility for curriculum leadership. The priority for the principal and management in the school is to lead and foster significant school improvement through the implementation of agreed programmes of learning, teaching approaches and systematic monitoring. There is good capacity, willingness and ability among the staff and board members to improve the learning outcomes in the school and to address the challenges facing the school in the future.
- Facilities and resources in the school are very good. The school building is very well maintained and the school grounds are spacious and attractive.
- The Parents' Association plays an active part in the life of the school and is commended on the significant fundraising carried out to support teaching and learning. Questionnaires administered for the evaluation indicate that parents hold the school in high regard.
- The rapport between teachers and pupils is very good. Teachers are sensitive to pupil welfare and their varying needs and the atmosphere in classes is generally warm, supportive and positive and pupils overall feel safe and secure. This is supported by evidence from the pupil questionnaires. However, a significant number of pupils identified poor pupil behaviour in some classes. It is recommended that this issue be further addressed through a review of the behaviour policy involving parents, pupils and the support personnel and the consistent implementation though the school of the very effective management strategies used in some classes.

4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation

- While the board, principal and staff have been involved in the development of various policy and planning documents, considerable review and updating is required to ensure that they are relevant to the school and useful in guiding general practices and teaching and learning. The school is required under the DEIS initiative to prepare a detailed action plan to improve learning outcomes. However, the current DEIS plan is out of date. All teachers prepare long and short-term planning. Most of this planning includes clearly identified learning outcomes and a number of teachers plan focused approaches for differentiated teaching.
- The school is commended on the work done to date on collating and analysing assessment data at a whole-school level. Using this information and an action planning process, the principal should lead and facilitate the preparation of a new three-year DEIS action plan containing targets and improvement measures to address school improvement. The new DEIS plan should be developed in tandem with the overall school development plan and all partners should be actively involved in this process. All plans and policies, once drafted, should be agreed and ratified by the board of management. It is recommended that all teachers reflect the actions identified in this new DEIS action plan in their own individual planning and implement them in a cohesive, collaborative and systematic way.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently

published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- Almost all parents stated, in the questionnaires, that they are happy with the standard of teaching in the school and feel that their children are doing well. However, the majority of the pupils surveyed stated that their lessons were not interesting, that they didn't enjoy learning and that they didn't like school. Furthermore, there has been no improvement in the overall attainment in English and Mathematics in recent years.
- During the inspection, it was evident that the levels of pupil engagement in learning did vary from class to class and that programmes of learning were not always appropriate to pupil needs and interest levels. In a few classes there was an over-reliance on whole-class teaching with little or no active engagement of the pupils and no differentiated programmes of learning provided. It is recommended therefore, that the good teaching practices witnessed in a number of classes, (including the use of well structured activities, appropriate resources and clear, focused explanations) be shared with all staff and used as appropriate. It is particularly recommended that programmes of learning and activities reflecting the differing abilities, learning needs and interests of the pupils be developed as a priority. The ongoing monitoring of achievement and progress in a systematic way, with relevant feedback given to pupils, will be crucial to the success of these actions.
- Tá éagsúlacht suntasach le brath maidir le cáilíocht an teagaisc agus caighdeán foghlamtha na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge tríd an scoil. Ba chóir béim a chur ar scileanana a fhorbairt sa Ghaeilge labhartha, éisteachta, léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta go leanúnach ó rang go rang. Ba chóir béim a chur chomh maith ar úsáid as raon níos léithe áiseanna agus ar chur chuige struchtúrta agus gníomhach chun an teanga a dhaingniú.
- *There is noticeable difference with regard to the quality of teaching and the standard of pupils' learning in Irish, across the school. Emphasis should be placed on an incremental approach to the acquisition of specific speaking, reading, writing and listening skills. Emphasis should also be placed on the use of a wider range of resources and a more structured and active teaching approach to consolidate learning.*
- There is a significant challenge for the school to raise standards in oral language competency and in English reading. It is recommended that specific targets for the development of discrete oral language skills are identified and a range of effective strategies put in place, on a whole-school basis, to achieve these targets.
- All pupils have access to a class library and are encouraged to make personal choices and to read regularly. There is an inconsistency and lack of cohesion in the teaching of reading skills. To bring about improvements in reading achievements it will be necessary to focus on pupils' reading at an instructional level, on developing specific reading skills in an incremental manner through the school and on using teaching strategies more appropriate to pupils' interest and ability levels.
- Some good writing samples were on display using the *First Steps* writing approach. It was evident that where this approach was implemented in a structured and consistent manner, pupils were making some progress. There is a notable lack of consistency in how teachers provide feedback on writing to pupils. Pupils also noted this in the questionnaires. While pupils need to be given more opportunities for personal writing they also need more formative feedback to support development and progression.

- A range of good teaching strategies is being used by teachers in the teaching of Mathematics. It is recommended that as learning targets in Mathematics are identified and agreed, the good teaching strategies are disseminated and implemented on a consistent basis through the school. This will also include the provision of mathematics rich environments in all classes.
- The school has gathered a wide range of assessment data on pupil achievement in Mathematics including standardised test results and basic number screening tests. This information has been used purposefully to develop a model of team-teaching in some classes to support pupils with very low achievement levels in Mathematics. However, according to the data, significant numbers of pupils are underperforming in Mathematics at each class level. It is recommended that the assessment data be used to inform differentiated teaching of mathematical concepts across all ability levels in all classes. This may require a further development of the team-teaching model. To support the priorities identified for Mathematics, it is also recommended that agreed whole-school approaches to aspects of Mathematics teaching be identified and implemented on a consistent basis.
- Overall, effective practice is evident in Science. Lessons, generally, are well structured and a broad range of resources is utilised appropriately. The pupils' ability to work scientifically and their skills of observation, prediction, investigation and recording are suitably promoted. The high level of pupil involvement in activities results in the achievement of quality learning outcomes. Highly commendable environmental awareness and care practices are fostered throughout the school through the pupils' involvement in the *Green Schools'* initiative. Also notable is their participation in the *Discover Primary Science* initiative and the organisation of an annual open day for science.

6. Quality of Support for Pupils

- The recently drafted Special Education Needs (SEN) policy is clear and incorporates the staged approach. It is essential that this policy is directly linked to the school's new DEIS plan and the targets set out therein. While some good practices were evident in the SEN settings, the effective dissemination and implementation of this new policy will facilitate a cohesive approach to the teaching approaches used including approaches to team-teaching and other in-class supports. It will also provide clarity on the specific roles of all staff members in meeting the special education needs of pupils. Furthermore, it should facilitate a co-ordinated approach to the formulation and review of pupils' education profiles and the keeping of records.
- The principle of inclusion is central to the life of the school. A range of effective support programmes and personnel is in place to help meet the particular needs of targeted groups of pupils. These include the HSCL co-ordinator, the *School Completion Programme* (SCP) and the *Headlamps* facilitator. A care team meets regularly and responds effectively to critical needs that arise and ensures that appropriate action plans are put in place. The school is commended on the co-ordinated, cohesive approach taken by the various support-services in the school.

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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 St. Fergal's Senior N.S. wishes to acknowledge the professional and positive approach of the Department Inspectors in conducting our Whole School Evaluation in January 2012. The Board is happy with the constructive nature of the report and the quality of the dialogue with the Board, the teaching and support staff, parents and school support agencies.

The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the inclusive nature of the school as this confirms the fundamental aim of the school to ensure that all children are made welcome and enabled to achieve their full potential. This aim is consistent with the Catholic ethos of the school and is central to all our work.

The Board is pleased with the report's findings on assessment which has been the subject of much work by the teaching staff. The quality of information available to teachers has been further enhanced since the WSE with comparative data available in written and profile form thus enabling further effective scrutiny of pupils' progress. (See below).

The Board values the ongoing work by the teaching staff in science, consequently the report's findings regarding science are welcomed. The school's commitment to environmental awareness and care is steadfast and will be continuously strengthened.

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 notes the main recommendations of the report.

Work has begun on the development of a revised Deis plan, which the Board will ensure is consistently implemented. The process of school self evaluation for the Deis Plan has commenced. It will also incorporate the school's improvement plan for literacy and specifically reading in the school year 2012/2013. The construction of profiles of pupil achievement will assist the school in devising targets for the pupils which will be closely monitored through assessment activities throughout the year.

The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of good teaching practice. It notes the strong recommendation of differentiated programmes of learning and will engage with the staff to work towards and ensure consistency in the delivery of the curriculum across the whole school.

The Board welcomes the statement in the report that almost all parents are happy with the standard of teaching in the school and that they feel their children are doing well.

The pupils have been surveyed recently on their attitudes and their opinions in the development of the school improvement plan in literacy. The Board and staff will also encourage further initiatives to enable pupils' voice to be heard as an integral part of the self evaluation process.

In conclusion, the Board welcomes the acknowledgement of its work by the inspectorate and will develop a strategic plan for the future of the school bearing in mind the recommendations of the Whole School Evaluation.